

Cigarettes in the ashtray

Thursday
December 31 1998
Britain's newspaper
for Europe

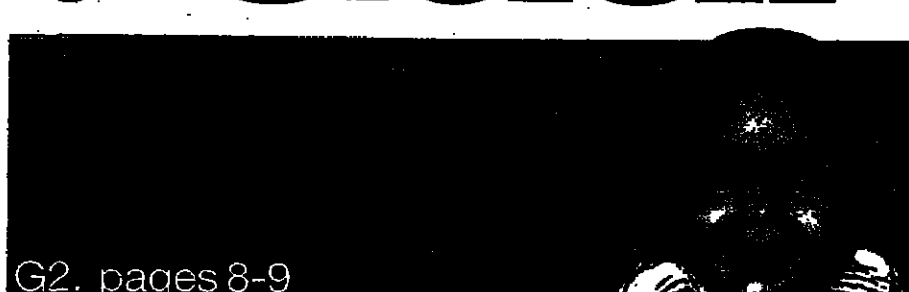


The Guardian

EUROPE



Special New Year's Eve G2



G2, pages 8-9



Hugo Young, page 8

Miracle of survival on the mountain of death

Gerard Seenan describes how three climbers defied the odds to survive for 16 hours buried beneath 3ft of snow after an avalanche which killed four of their party



Paul Hopkins and his girlfriend Emma Ray, who died on Aonach Mor, along with Ian Edwards, top right. Guide Roger Wild, bottom right, survived

AS the mountaineers grappled for life in the air pockets beneath the snow, Roger Wild's wife picked up the emergency chain that is so much a part of her winter life. Only this time there was a twist: her husband was not the rescuer but the person in need of rescue.

On Aonach Mor, the craggy mountain which, side by side with Ben Nevis, towers over Fort William, Mr Wild and his party of six were buried under tons of snow. The group had left for the mountain early on Tuesday morning, seeking to learn under Mr Wild's tutelage the secrets of survival on the perilous winter mountains. They

could have had no idea how vital these skills would become.

Mr Wild was well used to the dangers of Scotland's mountains. As a member of the Lochaber mountain rescue team, he had often picked up the dead and rescued the living from the unforgiving terrain. On Tuesday he would have made the same careful preparations — telling his wife where he was going and what time he would be back, and telephoning for weather reports.

Only the call to the Scottish Avalanche Information Service would have given slight cause for concern. It was issuing a category three — intermediate — warning for the 4,006ft Aonach Mor.

But Mr Wild was an expert

enced mountaineer and he regularly taught winter survival courses: the area was not prone to avalanche, the warning was worth noting, but it was not enough to keep the group from the mountain.

A few hours later, at about 10.30am, the warning became a ghastly reality. In the Aonach an Nid basin on the eastern face of Aonach Mor, the avalanche fell. As the snow roared, the party of seven would have been powered helplessly along. Mr Wild would perhaps have tried to swim along the top of the snow, keeping himself as far from its suffocating depths as he could. His six companions would have been more reliant on fortune. Two were lucky, four were not.

Emma Ray, aged 29, of Wil-

lington, Kent, Paul Hopkins, 28, of Wilmington, Matthew Lewis, 28, of Dartford, Kent, and Ian Edwards, 30, all died.

But Steven Newton, 24, of Dartford, and Sarah Finch, 25, of Hartley, Kent, along with Mr Wild, were more fortunate. As the avalanche came to a rest, air cavities formed between the huge lumps of snow. Buried alive 3ft beneath the surface, they survived for 16 hours. Most avalanche victims survive for only two or three hours in these air pockets. The longest anyone has ever survived is believed to be 22 hours.

The three survivors had a miraculous escape. They were conscious when they arrived in hospital and escaped without even a broken bone," said Brian Fregaskis, the doc-

tor who treated the victims.

It was 12 hours after the avalanche, as the air supply thinned and hypothermia set in, that the alarm was raised. At 10.30pm Roger Wild's wife began the drill. He had not come home and he was too sensible a mountaineer not to call if he was going to be late. She telephoned the police who in turn called Lochaber mountain rescue team. Terry Coxfield, the team leader and Mr Wild's colleague, began the search.

Mr Wild had left a map of his route with his wife, so the rescue team had a head start. About 30 men from the Lochaber team and RAF rescue teams from Kinloss, Leuchars, Fife and Leeming started for Aonach Mor. A helicopter was scrambled

from RAF Lossiemouth, but the rotor action of the blades created too great a risk of further avalanche. The rescue teams instead used the gondola — a kind of enclosed cable car — to hasten their journey up the mountain.

It did not take them long to reach the dead and the living. At around midnight one of the rescuers noticed a head and arm protruding from the fallen snow. The avalanche had hardly separated the party and the rescuers quickly found the others.

"We could not believe it when three of the people, two men and a woman, were still alive," said John Stevenson, turn to page 3, column 6

Major leads Ulster honours

Lucy Ward and John Mullin

TONY Blair today makes the key players in the historic Northern Ireland peace agreement the centrepiece of his New Year Honours in a list which gives unprecedented recognition to his predecessor, John Major, but omits members of the nationalist community who refused their awards.

The former prime minister becomes a Companion of Honour in the list of almost a thousand names. There are honours recognising the achievement of the three-strong international partnership at the heart of the peace negotiations: talks chairman Senator George Mitchell and his two co-chairs, former Finnish prime minister Harri Holkeri and Canadian General John de Chastelain.

But Downing Street, anxious to proclaim equal treatment of both communities in the province, broke with tradition by underlining that a number of nationalists had been offered honours but turned them down. The nationalist SDLP has a rule of not accepting British honours.

A Downing Street spokesman said yesterday: "Honours were offered to individuals from the nationalist community, which they declined. We completely understand and we are relaxed about it."

One senior SDLP figure said last night: "Our identity is not British, so it would make no sense for us to accept. But nobody should see it as a snub."

Mr Major's commendation, which elevates him to a select group of 65 Companions of Honour in recognition of his contribution to the peace process, was said by Downing Street to be the first time a predecessor of another party for a political achievement.

The only unionist politician to receive an honour is Reg Empey, former Lord Mayor of Belfast and moderate Ulster Unionist who stood by party leader David Trimble when fellow party member Jeffrey Donaldson walked out of peace talks on the day the Good Friday agreement was signed last Easter.

RUC chief constable Ronnie Flanagan gains a knighthood, and Northern Ireland ministers Adam Ingram and Paul Murphy — who played a crucial role in peace negotiations — are elevated to privy councillors.

Alongside the emphasis on

Northern Ireland, which comes almost exactly five years after the signing of the Downing Street declaration by Mr Major and the then Irish premier Albert Reynolds, the list contains the traditional sprinkling of celebrities together with captains of industry and business lead-

Highlights

- Entertainment**
 - Nigel Hawthorne actor, Knighthood
 - Desiree Lavinia hepatist, MBE
 - Lesley Harrow comedian, CBE
 - Roger Moore actor, CBE
 - Dusty Springfield singer, CBE
 - Robert Carlyle actor, CBE
 - Tina Turner singer, CBE
- Sport**
 - Trevor Bocking football coach, CBE
 - Shirley White snooker player, MBE
 - Angus Fraser England pace bowler, MBE
 - Deshaun Leland basketball, MBE
 - David Williams Formula One, Knighthood
 - Stewart Pearce Newcastle United player, MBE
 - Prince Maurice Napier boxer, MBE
- Media and arts**
 - Hildegard Willet artist, Companion of Honour
 - Trevor Phillips broadcaster, CBE
 - Harry Beebe Press Association chairman, Knighthood
 - Nicholas Skene director, Tate Gallery, Knighthood
 - Shirley Hughes children's author, CBE
- Politics**
 - John Major Companion of Honour
 - George Mitchell peace talks chairman, Grand Knight of the Order of the British Empire
 - Michael Gove Liberal Democrat, Privy Council
 - Adam Ingram Northern Ireland minister, Privy Council
 - Paul Murphy Northern Ireland minister, Privy Council

Kidnapped Britons 'were used as human shields'

Yemen survivors say army attack provoked murder of hostages

Nancy Carroll and Brian Whitaker

YEMENI kidnappers used British tourists as human shields and executed them after security forces stormed their hide-out, survivors said yesterday, contradicting the authorities' version of the botched rescue.

The hostages were caught in the middle after govern-

ment troops opened fire and the Islamic extremists tried to escape, leaving four hostages dead and two wounded.

"It was getting tense and the abductors were getting more keen to use us as human shields. We were told to stand up in open ground with our hands up," said Brian Smith, aged 52, a Peterborough postal worker. Bullets whizzed overhead for two hours, he added.

Another hostage, Eric Fitch, aged 55, a chemistry teacher from Groydon, south London, said: "The worst time for me was when a barrel was pointed at my chest."

The kidnappers had split their 18 captives into two groups and were leading them to a mountain hide-out on Tuesday when they heard gunfire from government forces.

The dead Britons were named as Peter Rowe, aged 60, a maths lecturer at Durham University; Margaret Whitehouse, aged 53, a teacher from Hook, Hampshire; and Ruth Williamson,

aged 34, from Edinburgh. Andrew Thirk, aged 35, of Sydney, Australia, also died.

Dr Rowe's wife, Claire Marston, aged 43, was in Al-Jamhouria Hospital in Aden, recovering from serious gunshot wounds to her shoulder. She was in a "very bad way", said David Pearce of the Foreign Office. The other wounded woman, an American, was shot in the pelvis.

The unharmed survivors will fly home tomorrow, said Explore Worldwide, the travel company which organised the 14-night break.

Yemen's interior ministry

yesterday stuck to its version that security forces had opened fire only after the kidnappers began killing some of their hostages at a camp, near Mawdiyah town, 175 miles south of the capital, Sana'a.

The tour group — 12 Britons, two Americans and two Australians — was abducted from its five-vehicle convoy on Monday. Three kidnappers were killed and three, including the leader, were captured, said the ministry.

The rescue has come under a barrage of criticism. Baroness Symons, the Foreign Office minister, said: "We

must get to the bottom of this, and find out why the Yemeni authorities decided to take the action they did."

Yemeni officials have identified one of the kidnappers who died as an Egyptian Islamic extremist known as Osama al-Masri. They said the kidnappers belonged to Islamic Jihad, a group of 200 members in south Yemen.

Meanwhile, four Germans kidnapped by Yemeni tribesmen on December 7 were yesterday freed unharmed, Yemeni officials said.

Survivors' tales, page 5

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| Albania D 1.50 | Cyprus CE 1.10 | Greece D 5.00 | Latvia US\$ 2 | Poland R 30 | Spain P 2.75 |
| Austria US\$ 2 | Czech Rep. KC 05 | Hong Kong HK\$ 25 | Lebanon L 3.000 | Portugal E 2.00 | Sweden SK 17 |
| Belgium BF 70 | Denmark DK 17 | India IN 100 | Luxembourg LF 65 | Romania R 32.000 | Switzerland SF 3.50 |
| Canada CS 3.95 | Euro D 8.50 | Israel IL 100 | Netherlands NL 2.75 | Russia RU 2.75 | Taiwan T 250.000 |
| Croatia CR 15.00 | Finland FM 15 | Italy I 3.500 | Norway NK 16 | Saudi Arabia SA 10 | Thailand TH 50 |
| | France FF 12 | Jordan JO 125 | Sweden SK 75 | Slovenia SL 280 | Turkey TL 250.000 |
| | Germany DM 3.80 | Korea KH 150 | Switzerland SF 3.50 | | Ukraine UA 3.50 |
| | | Kuwait KD 0.50 | USA US\$ 3.00 | | |

UK news

International

Comment

Obituaries

Crossword

Imagine what we can do tomorrow.

Happy days

In **G2 EUROPE** today: 1999 — there's no need to panic. The world isn't going to end for months yet

+ What happened in 1999 + How to be a Scot + The race for the first babies of 2000 + European weather, TV and Radio

EU plans £3bn Russian gamble

Martin Walker in Brussels

THE European Union is to gamble £3 billion on a new aid strategy for Russia, aimed principally at subsidising and encouraging foreign private investment. Tough conditions will require the fulfilment of precise interim performance targets before new money is released.

"This will give the [European] Commission an instrument that will enable it to change the situation in Russia, Ukraine and the other independent states completely," the commissioner for external affairs, Hans van den Broek, said. "Our new programme must set itself much higher ambitions."

The 15 EU national governments have to approve the plan next month, as one of the first tasks of the new German presidency of the EU Council. They are almost certain to do so, sources in Brussels said yesterday, because the Russian situation is seen as desperate.

The existing Tacis programme, which has spent more than £2 billion since 1991 as the EU's main aid and technical assistance vehicle, is to be overhauled and renamed. This follows a highly critical internal review which concluded that "coherent strategies for promoting the Tacis objectives of market-oriented reforms and the reinforcement of democracy are largely absent".

There is a whiff of panic about the new EU approach, inspired by fear of a humanitarian disaster in Russia and waves of refugees, with the nightmare scenario of a breakdown of authority in a country with more than 20,000 nuclear warheads.

The commission, however, insists that there is a more hopeful scenario. This assumes that after a bumpy period of stabilisation and economic recovery, the Russian economy starts to take off. A market of 150 million people, well-educated and hungry for consumer goods, could become an important locomotive for European growth in the next century.

The problem is that Russia

is not a place with the skills and traditions of law, commercial contract and investment banking that can benefit from a Marshall Plan.

Until last summer's collapse, Europe imported about £15 billion a year in energy and raw materials, and exported back a similar value of finished and consumer goods. Since the collapse, the energy purchases have continued, but Russia's ability to import has collapsed.

"The Russian crisis is multi-faceted. So too must be the response of the EU," the 15 heads of government said after their summit in Vienna this month. "The EU is ready to help Russia in overcoming the crisis through credible and sustained market-based reforms, while respecting urgent social needs, and a continued commitment to democracy, including freedom of the media, the rule of law and respect for human rights."

The trick will be to convert those sensible platitudes into real policies, starting with the £200 million food aid programme that is being prepared to get the Russians through the worst part of the winter.

The new scheme proposes to put 25 per cent of EU funds into promoting private investment, and another 25 per cent into incentive schemes to reward the best development projects in each of the former Soviet states. The current "scattergun" approach under which Tacis has supported 1,011 separate programmes is to be replaced by a priority system of putting more resources into fewer than 100 better controlled projects.

The EU will keep plugging away at aid projects to improve the safety of Russian nuclear power plants, and to inculcate the banking, accounting and financial skills that both public and private sectors sorely need.

Not only has Russian agriculture been left largely in the hands of the traditional managers of the old collective farm system, but the basic legal reform of land privatisation has yet to be enacted. Above all, land cannot be used as collateral for loans, and until it can there is little that the magic of the market can do for Russia's farmers.



Mum's the word... Nkem Chukwu receives flowers from husband Iyke Louis Udobi as she returns home. PHOTOGRAPH BY BRETT COOMER

Mother's delight at 7 'gifts of God'

Jeff Franks

PRAISING God and asking the world for more help, the mother of seven surviving octuplets went home from hospital yesterday, but her critically ill babies stayed behind.

Nkem Chukwu, 27, left Texas Children's Hospital in a wheelchair, but said she felt great. "I'm blessed," she said, and vowed to return every day to see her five girls and two boys in intensive care.

"They're great boys and girls... the first time I saw them I was amazed at what

God gave us," said Ms Chukwu. She took fertility drugs to help her conceive, but had no regrets. Ms Chukwu did not rule out having more children.

She and husband Iyke Louis Udobi, 41, thanked the world for their prayers and donations, which have included a year's supply of groceries and nappies, but said more was needed. Their suburban Houston home and family car would not hold all the infants.

"We need seven more of everything we have," said Mr Udobi, a respiratory therapist at a Houston hospital. "I haven't gotten over the shock."

The first baby was born naturally on December 8, four months premature, while the other seven were delivered by Caesarean section on December 20. The smallest baby, a girl nicknamed Odera, died on Sunday from lung and heart failure.

The babies, all in critical condition and three still on ventilators, will not go home for at least two months, said paediatrician Patti Savrick. But she added: "I think we're going to (eventually) discharge seven healthy babies."

Doctors said it would cost about \$250,000 to care for each baby until they left

hospital. Mr Udobi, who like his wife is a Nigerian-born US citizen, was said to have medical insurance through his employer.

Mr Udobi faces trial on February 8 for allegedly assaulting his mother-in-law, Janet Chukwu, with a chair and threatening his wife during a family quarrel. But yesterday, Janet Chukwu appeared to be on good terms with her son-in-law. — Reuters

New Iraqi attack brings US strike

Julian Borger in Washington

BITISH Tornados and American F-16 warplanes came under anti-aircraft missile fire over southern Iraq yesterday, triggering retaliatory strikes by the United States against Iraqi air-defences in the second such skirmish in three days.

The aircraft, patrolling the no-fly zone over southern Iraq, were not thought to have been under serious threat, as they were flying well above the normal range of the six SA-6 missiles believed to have been fired towards them.

The missiles were first spotted by British pilots at 9.30am local time (0630 GMT), who saw the flash of their launch near the southern Iraqi town of Tallil.

"The aircraft took evasive action and we responded to this unprovoked attack by firing Harrier missiles and several 500lb precision-guided bombs," Major Joe LaMarca, a spokesman for US central command, said.

He said the counter-attack came 45 minutes after the Iraqi missile-launch, following consultations with senior commanders on how best to respond. Maj LaMarca said US Harrier missiles were used to deter Iraqi air-defences from using their radar to target US or British aircraft. "This time they did not turn on their radar," he said.

He said it was unlikely the 45-minute delay before the counter-attack had allowed sufficient time for the Iraqi missile-launchers to be moved, but it was unclear yesterday evening whether they had been destroyed.

Iraq said US aircraft fire killed a farmer and wounded two other civilians in a village in the south. The statement, carried by the official Iraqi News Agency, made no mention of military casualties.

Two days earlier, Iraqi SA-6 missiles were fired against US aircraft over the northern air exclusion zone, drawing immediate return fire that destroyed the Iraqi launchers.

Monday's attack was the first time since 1996 that the Iraqis had fired surface-to-air missiles against Western aircraft. Defence analysts believe that the two attacks were largely symbolic, designed to signal President Saddam Hussein's defiance of the US-British military presence over Iraq, and to show that the Iraqi dictator was unbowed by the four-day bombardment of Operation Desert Fox earlier this month.

Britain's Defence Secretary, George Robertson, said the allies had not stepped up their patrols to try to provoke President Saddam, but neither would they be "intimidated" from policing the no-fly zones.

He told BBC Radio 4 the zones had been set up in sup-

'We are there to protect human beings who've been attacked by Saddam'

George Robertson

port of United Nations Security Council resolution 688 because President Saddam's forces had attacked Kurd communities in the north and Shi'a Muslims in the south.

The flights were humanitarian, he said. "We are there in the no-fly zones to protect human beings who have been brutally and murderously attacked by Saddam Hussein and his regime."

President Bill Clinton made no comment on yesterday's incident, but the White House national security spokesman, David Leary, said the no-fly zones would be maintained.

"This is a key element of our containment policy to prevent Saddam from using his aircraft to threaten his own people and his neighbours," Mr Leary said.

Dylan Thomas: tinker, tailor, poet, spy?

Writer may have been recruited for intelligence mission in Iran

Richard Norton-Taylor

DYLAN Thomas, the iconic Welsh poet, appears to have been recruited as a secret propagandist for British intelligence in the tradition of eminent literary figures, including Daniel Defoe and Christopher Marlowe, it has emerged.

Thomas made a trip to Iran in 1951, ostensibly after being commissioned to write a film script describing the benefits of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the forerunner of BP, brought to the country.

But no script emerged from

his visit, which lasted five weeks, and Thomas was noted for his discretion, was uncharacteristically unforthcoming about it.

According to Paul Ferris, Thomas's biographer, the BP file about the episode has disappeared.

To Britain's horror, Mohammed Mossadeq, on the verge of becoming Iran's prime minister on a wave of popular support, was planning to nationalise the oil company.

Thomas, a writer with an international reputation, would have been well-placed to take soundings of the mood of the Iranian intelligentsia,



Dylan Thomas: mysterious role in oil company dilemma

and influence them, says David Callard, a literary biographer.

"Despite the fact that London was stocked with script

writers with Middle Eastern experience, Thomas was chosen and packed off at very short notice," Mr Callard says. Iranians were suspicious of westerners, if that person was leftist, indeed, sympathetic to the nationalist cause, yet publicly apologetic; if that person was arguably the most famous living British poet, visiting a country where the poet was revered," he asks.

But unsurprisingly, Mr Callard adds, Thomas was antipathetic to the oilmen for whom he was supposed to be working. The poet's only contribution was a few minutes of a radio documentary called "Persian oil". According to Mr Ferris, a BBC producer who proposed a more elaborate programme was told by a

senior colleague that the Anglo-Iranian oil company had "some kind of hold over what Dylan might say".

Mr Callard insists that it would have taken more than threats from the oil company to have kept Thomas's mouth shut. He concludes that pressure must have come from British intelligence.

The unexplained circumstances surrounding the mysterious episode in the poet's life are explored in the latest issue of the New Welsh Review, a quarterly magazine, published today.

Two years after apparently trying to enlist Thomas to promote western interests in an enterprise which seemed hopeless from the start, MI6 took more drastic action. With the help of the CIA, it toppled Mossadeq in a coup.

Grown-up Clara in too-sensible Wonderland

Review

Judith Mackrell

Nutcracker/English Royal Ballet, Covent Garden, London

JONG ago, before the redevelopment of Sadler's Wells and the tragicomic at the Opera House, there was a large and enthusiastic lobby angling for The Lyric to become London's pre-dance house. In fact, the

theatre went the way of most West End venues — it was bought up by Apollo Leisure to house shows such as Jesus Christ Superstar.

But it remains a charming place for ballet to visit, and its riotously opulent decor is the perfect frame for Birmingham Royal Ballet's Nutcracker, which is the most decoratively traditional of the versions currently danced.

It was staged by Peter Wright back in 1990, yet the magic of its transformation scenes (the key to any Nutcracker's success) is still potent. When the Christmas tree

and drawing room start to grow, the change of scale is so monumental that you feel like Alice plunging into the hallucinations of Wonderland.

The battle with the mice under the tree's huge branches has the shadowy menace of nightmare, and when Clara arrives at the Kingdom of the Sweets — after a glorious flight across the stage on a swan's back — she finds herself in a terrifyingly cold, grey castle, which awaits Drosselmeyer's conjuring gesture to bring it to brilliant life. Such details put the ballet in touch with other ballets and

other fairy tales, like Sleeping Beauty, The Snow Queen, Swan Lake. It also suits the new frame within which Wright views the ballet.

Which is that Clara, rather than being a child, is a ballet student, whose encounter with the fantasy dancing characters in the Kingdom of the Sweets becomes her rite of passage into ballerinahood.

This notion smooths away several of the Nutcracker's creakier dramatic inconsistencies and makes space for some new and delightful choreography. But it also makes the ballet too sensible.

The disturbingly anarchic elements left over from the original Hoffmann tale are nearly all gone. Drosselmeyer lacks the quasi-sinister, quasi-tragic status of a man who sees beyond the surface of domestic life. Despite the magic of the setting, there is no really urgent battle being waged between good and evil, terror and normality.

And although Sandra Magdwick was light-footed and ecstatic in the role of Clara, she is obviously a grown-up. We don't see the ballet through the bewildered wonderment of a child.

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Bad weather forecast not enough to deter experienced local guide □ Victims were just one hour into a two-day survival skills course

'God help anybody who is up in this'

Avalanche risk 'considerable', report warned

Peter Hetherington

ON Monday evening the daily avalanche report for the Highlands warned that "medium or large" snow movements may occur the following day, triggering a real possibility of "low additional load".

"What that translates to is that the presence of one climber or skier on a slope may trigger an avalanche," said Blyth Wright, who co-ordinates the report for evening broadcast from the Scottish Sports Council's outdoor centre in the Cairngorms. "I would say, based on that, 'keep off the most affected slopes' — but we're not saying 'don't go to the mountains' because even when conditions are hazardous an experienced person may be able to choose a safe route."

Avalanche reporting is a highly technical exercise.

'Conditions were horrible and I couldn't get down quickly enough'

Weather forecasts from the Met Office in Glasgow are fed to the Cairngorm centre as observation teams from the Sports Council assess conditions on the ground in five mountain areas — Glencoe, Lochaber (scene of the latest disaster), North and South Cairngorm, and a chunk of mountains between Fort William and Kingussie.

Monday's report pointed to a "considerable" avalanche risk for Tuesday, or category three on a European avalanche scale, which can rise to five — a category rarely encountered in Scotland. Occasionally they issue a category four warning.

But Mr Wright said category three was the most difficult to assess because "it is a grey area where hard judgments have to be made".

On Tuesday morning, when the seven-strong party set out for Aonach Mor, the risks were clear. The latest report said: "Existing areas of unstable soft [snow] slab will still

be present, mainly on easterly aspects above 900 metres ... windslab will be redistributed and new deposits will fall mainly on north and north-east aspects."

But conditions had been much worse. "We think they were not extreme when they went out, although unpleasant," Mr Wright said.

Nevertheless, some skiers and climbers had decided to retreat. Some sought either safer slopes, such as Glencoe, or by calling it a day.

Cameron McInish, the well-known Scots climber and broadcaster, had climbed to 2,500ft west of the Cairngorms on Tuesday before retreating. Ben Nevis was not far away.

"Conditions became absolutely horrible and I couldn't get down quickly enough," he said.

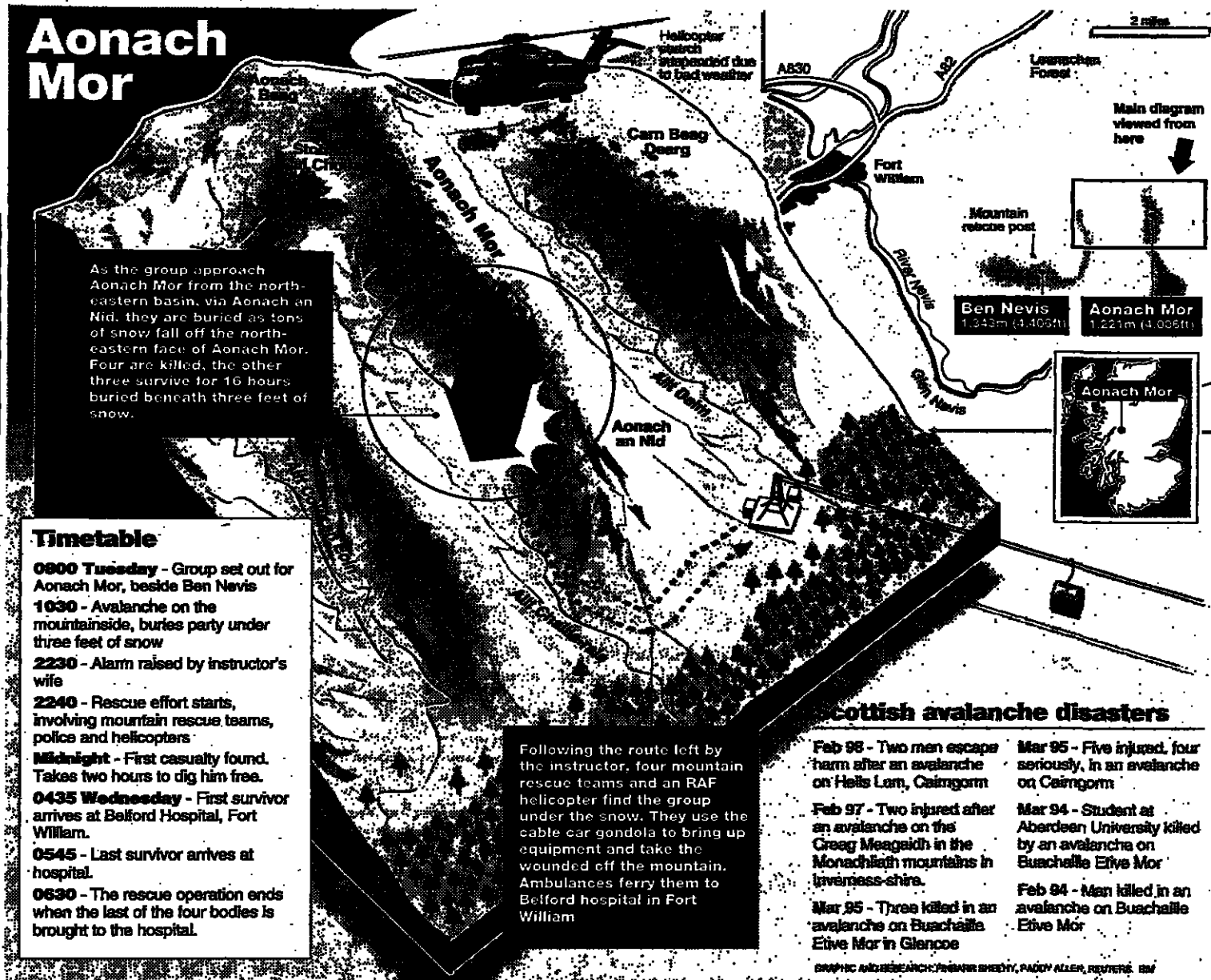
"I thought 'God help anybody who is up in this'. Things began changing in the space of a few minutes. Spindrift in the face, making it difficult to see, and you could barely stand up. Then the temperature started to rise — classic avalanche conditions. There were lots of storm reports about."

Mr McInish, who has just undertaken a second series of Wilderness Walks for BBC2, said even the most experienced mountaineers can fall victim to the hills.

After a day's climbing on Ben Nevis, it was easy to take a wrong bearing and end up away from the main path in the dreaded Five Finger's Gully. "A lot of people, including experienced mountaineers, have been killed what way."

Two years ago he was swept away by an avalanche while instructing a group of people. Fortunately, no one was injured. "But it made me realise I had to learn as much about avalanches as I possibly could."

He added: "People will say an avalanche is a combination of bad luck and poor judgment. But if anything can be learned from an accident like this it is that there is no such thing as winter hill walking in Scotland — it is purely and simply mountaineering. What may well be an easy walk in good conditions becomes a mountaineering exercise in conditions like we have had over the past few days."



Timetable

0900 Tuesday - Group set out for Aonach Mor, beside Ben Nevis

1030 - Avalanche on the mountainside, buries party under three feet of snow

2230 - Alarm raised by instructor's wife

2240 - Rescue effort starts, involving mountain rescue teams, police and helicopters

Midnight - First casualty found. Takes two hours to dig him free

0435 Wednesday - First survivor arrives at Belford Hospital, Fort William

0545 - Last survivor arrives at hospital

0630 - The rescue operation ends when the last of the four bodies is brought to the hospital

Following the route left by the instructor, four mountain rescue teams and an RAF helicopter find the group under the snow. They use the cable car gondola to bring up equipment and take the wounded off the mountain. Ambulances ferry them to Belford hospital in Fort William

Scottish avalanche disasters

Feb 98 - Two men escape harm after an avalanche on Heils Lam, Cairngorm

Feb 97 - Two injured after an avalanche on the Great Meagaidh in the Monachilis mountains in Inverness-shire

Mar 95 - Three killed in an avalanche on Buachaille Etive Mor in Glencoe

Mar 95 - Five injured, four seriously, in an avalanche on Cairngorm

Mar 94 - Student at Aberdeen University killed by an avalanche on Buachaille Etive Mor

Feb 94 - Men killed in an avalanche on Buachaille Etive Mor

Death - and miracle survival

continued from page 1

deputy leader of Lochaber mountain rescue team. "Although very hypothermic, they were still conscious and one of them was able to speak but it took great effort." It was the first time Terry Confield had ever brought anyone from an avalanche alive.

Steven Newton, the first survivor, was dug from the snow and taken to the gondola nearby. At the foot of the mountain, an ambulance was waiting to take him to Belford Hospital, Fort William, where he arrived at 4.35am. The other two survivors followed an hour later, shocked, suffering from mild hypothermia, and a little bruised.

At 6.30am, while the survivors recovered, the four victims were brought in. Doctors tried to resuscitate them, but less than an hour later they were pronounced dead.

For the three survivors, there was only awe and admiration for the luck of their escape.

"In the 18 years that I have been involved in rescues, I have never come across a case in which avalanche victims have survived for such a long period of time," said Patrick Thirkell, from the RAF rescue centre at Kinloss. "I honestly thought we would be looking for bodies. I find it utterly remarkable."

Friends who died doing what they most enjoyed

Sarah Hall

THE families of the four young mountaineers killed in an avalanche in the Scottish Highlands last night told of their grief at the loss of the intrepid friends who "did everything together" and perished. "Doing what they most enjoyed".

Ian Edwards, 30, Emma Ray, 29, and Matthew Lewis and Paul Hopkins, both 28, died after being caught in a supposedly safe area of Aonach Mor just an hour into a two-day "winter skills" training course.

The quartet — all experienced hill walkers — embarked on the climb while staying with nine other members of the 24-strong Dartford District Scout Fellowship on a barge to celebrate Hogmanay.

Two of their close friends, Steven Newton, 24, and Sarah Finch, 25, together with local guide, Roger Wild, survived. Last night they remained in hospital suffering from hypothermia.

In Dartford, Kent, the victims' families yesterday recalled a close-knit group, who had grown up together and developed their friendship through the camaraderie

of scouts and venture scouts. "They always did everything together from school upwards," said Daphne Lewis, the mother of Matthew, a chartered accountant.

Bobbie Hopkins, the mother of Paul, an electronics engineer for British Telecom, said he and Emma, who worked for Marks & Spencer's, had been childhood sweethearts. "They had been together since they were 15. They grew up together before they went out properly and had been living together for seven or eight years. They were absolutely devoted to each other. You don't stay

with someone that long unless you think an awful lot of them."

John Ray, a local taxi driver, said: "Emma and Paul were both experienced in hiking and climbing ... and the rest of the group were also experienced."

"He was a veritable action man really," said Bill Lewis of his son Matthew. "He was very keen to get the experience offered by this trip and was obviously very excited."

The families were insistent there should be no recriminations towards the guide, Roger Wild.

Mr Ray said: "From what

we have heard, the guide was very experienced and highly thought of by the police and mountain rescue people. They were actually in a safe area when this occurred. It was just one of those tragic things that happened."

Mrs Lewis said their thoughts were with the survivors. "They must have been through a dreadful trauma having been buried alive for 18 hours," she said. "They have to live with that for the rest of their lives and the fact their friends died. They must be in a terrible state mentally. They may never get over this."



Bill Lewis: Son Matthew was 'a veritable action man'

SNOW AND AVALANCHE REPORT LOCHABER

AVAILANCHE HAZARD 1500 HRS TUE 29/12/98

Strong southerly winds have deposited fresh windslab in sheltered locations with a NW, N and E aspect above 800m. This windslab is weakly bonded especially on steeper slopes. Where this windslab exists in sufficient quantity the avalanche hazard is Considerable (Category 3). All wind scoured snow slopes are generally stable.

The avalanche report for Tuesday for the Ben Nevis range. It predicted unstable snow on the steeper slopes

Tim Radford Science Editor

AVAILANCHE HAZARD 1500 HRS TUE 29/12/98

Different kinds of avalanches pose different hazards: a headlong rush of airborne powder snow carries a shockwave of snow-free air before it that will level trees or topple huts, but even greater dangers lie in the violent swirls within the snowdrift. The turbulence inside the wavefront of an avalanche has been measured at more than 200 miles an hour. A building hit on three sides

event that triggered it and whether or not the snow becomes airborne.

by one of these will simply disintegrate.

Wet snow kills in a different way: the momentum of the snow travelling at forces of more than 50 tons per square metre is enough to uproot trees and carry away massive boulders. One wet-snow avalanche in the Italian Alps was calculated to have contained 2.5 million tons of snow, and to have generated more than 300 million horsepower.

According to the Scottish Avalanche Information Service, 90 per cent of all

avalanches occur during snow storms, and 90 per cent of all avalanches that claim human victims are triggered by these victims. Any skier or climber caught in the path of an avalanche is advised to shout, throw away skis and rucksack and run to the side, out of the way. If that doesn't work, he or she should try to ride on the snow slab, roll like a log out of the debris, or try "swimming" with front crawl-like motions to keep near the surface.

Anyone buried should clear snow away from around the nose and mouth to get breathing space, spit to see which way is up, and then try to get at least a hand to the surface.

Even in a severe snowslide there could be survivors. One researcher looked at the cases of 422 skiers buried and then dug up by Swiss rescue teams between 1981 and 1991: those found in the first 15 minutes had a 90 per cent chance of surviving. Only those near enough to the

surface to open an airway could hope to last more than 30 minutes.

Eighty per cent of victims suffocate: one German company recently launched a skier's airbag system. A skier caught in an avalanche touches a ripcord to fill a balloon with compressed nitrogen in 2 seconds. The idea is to increase buoyancy and stop the skier being buried.

But the best tactic is to avoid danger zones: mountain centres use satellite systems to map hazard spots.

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Yemen hostage murders

'It was horrible — we are lucky to be alive'

Gun battle survivors tell how captors took their revenge

Rory Carroll and Brian Whitaker

IT WAS a hail of bullets from attacking Yemeni government troops that triggered off the execution of the tourists by their kidnappers.

According to survivors, the Islamic extremists returned fire with Kalashnikov automatic rifles, using their 16 hostages as cover. Then, during a two-hour battle against the 200 troops, they turned their guns on the hostages in revenge for a rescue attempt unprecedented in Yemen's history of kidnappings.

One hostage, Eric Firkin, speaking from the five-star Movenpick hotel in Aden, and still wearing sandals dusty from the trek, described how the attack began. "We were being led into the mountains to a hideout. Then we heard the gunfire." Having crouched down to shelter from the bullets, at one point he raised his head to see what was happening, and found himself with a gun pointed at his chest. "I said, 'No, no, no.' He did not die but the kidnappers killed two prisoners 'in revenge' as they fled. He said he saw one victim, a woman, shot in the back of her neck.

The hostages were split in



Survived... freed hostages Brian Smith, left, and Eric Firkin, in a hotel in Aden yesterday

two. Brian Smith said his group tried to comfort each other by holding hands. Two were killed, and two were injured. "We were in the middle of a battle," he said. "We weren't armed, and we had no military knowledge."

Three Britons and an Australian were killed and an American and a Briton were wounded. Yemen's interior ministry said three kidnappers were killed and three captured in the shoot-out near Mawdiyah town, 175 miles south of the capital, Sanaa.

After debriefing the hostages, British consular officials in Aden talked of acts of self-sacrifice. "All three countries [Britain, Australia, and the US] could be very proud of their citizens," said one diplomat. An unnamed hostage said from the hotel: "It was a horrible experience

and we are lucky to be alive. Our thoughts are with the families of the people — our friends — who were killed."

The accounts given contradict the Yemeni government's version of events, that security forces only opened fire after the kidnappers began killing hostages.

The 16 — 12 Britons, two Americans and two Australians — were seized a day earlier in an ambush on their five-vehicle convoy.

Mohammed Saleh al-Turaisi, chief of security in Aden province, insisted the kidnappers fired first. "The Egyptian began shooting at the hostages, which forced our troops to storm the hideout," he said in the presence of the British ambassador.

Yemen's embassy in London, attempting to deflect criticism, issued a statement: "The kidnappers were terror-

ists belonging to Islamic Jihad and their aim was martyrdom."

"The security forces made their move after the kidnappers had started killing the hostages, and the aim of the action was to prevent further killings and to save the lives of the hostages."

"The government and the people of Yemen are deeply shocked at the tragic loss of innocent lives, and sincerely share the grief of the families and relatives of the victims."

Jihad was originally made up of Arab veterans of the Afghan war, working with tribal elements in southern Yemen. They have been accused of past attacks, including the Aden hotel bombing of 1992. More recently Jihad split, and it was one of the resulting minor groups that carried out Monday's attack.

Family and friends pay tribute to courage of intrepid tourists

Rory Carroll

RELATIVES, colleagues and friends of the dead and injured Britons were shocked yesterday by their fate, but each drew a picture of an individual or couple with a love of adventure.

The 16 members of the tourist group were at the outset strangers but they bonded quickly and were enjoying their 21,200 foot night's adventure until Monday's kidnapping.

Those who knew them said they were aware of the warnings of kidnapping and lawlessness in the Yemen, but were determined to experience its history and atmosphere.

Tuesday's botched rescue left four dead and two injured. The Britons who died were named as Peter Rowe, aged 60, a mathematics lecturer at Durham university, Margaret Whitehouse, aged 53, a teacher from Hook, Hampshire, whose murder was witnessed by her husband Laurence, an economics lecturer at Farnborough sixth form college, and Ruth Williamson, aged 34, an NHS training consultant from Edinburgh. The fourth to die was Andrew



Killed... gun battle victims Ruth Williamson, top, Margaret Whitehouse, and Peter Rowe

Thirk, aged 35, of Sydney in Australia.

Claire Marston, aged 43, the wife of Dr Rowe and an accountancy lecturer at Northumbria university in Newcastle, received serious gunshot wounds in her shoulder, and yesterday was recovering in hospital in Aden, with an unnamed American woman who was also injured. Those not injured will be flown back tomorrow, their tour company, Explore Worldwide, said yesterday.

Dr Rowe grew up in Canada and arrived in Britain in the 1960s. Colleagues paid tribute to his abilities and to a maverick style that had endeared him to generations of students. His driving curiosity had led him to travel in Ghana, Nepal and the Himalayas.

David Fairley, a colleague of Dr Rowe, said: "He had a personality and was not one of your run-of-the-mill, standard-issue lecturers. He would have been aware of the dangers of Yemen, but I don't think it would have concerned him too much."

Dr Marston's sister, Louise, and her brother-in-law, Stephen Sunnucks, were last night preparing to fly to her bedside. "She is very strong, very capable. I am sure she will make it," Mr Sunnucks said.

Miss Williamson's uncle, Donald Main, last night told of her family's "devastation". "She was a wonderful person and had a marvellous, some would say wicked, sense of humour," he said.

Mrs Whitehouse's colleagues at Long Sutton primary school in Hampshire, broke the news to their 113 pupils. The head teacher, Alan Melbourne, said: "She was loved and respected by everyone in the school for her adventurous spirit and commitment to teaching."

The uninjured victims were named as Eric Firkin, a middle-aged teacher, Brian Smith, Pat Morris, Gill Doreu, and Susan Mattocks, a religious education teacher at Clarendon grammar school for girls in Ramsgate, Kent.

Jane Bennett, her head teacher, said she was an outstanding colleague who had a passion for adventure. "I don't think this incident will affect her confidence in travelling abroad at all. She has a passion to see the world — particularly the Far East and Middle East," she added.

'Geri-boom' costs set to spiral if free care falters

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

SPENDING on the long-term care of the elderly will need to rise more than 150 per cent over the next 30 years as the cost of services outstrips likely economic growth, according to a government-commissioned study.

Although this £14 billion increase in the bill is considered "not unaffordable" if present patterns of care persist, the study warns that it could climb steeply if there are changes — particularly any fall in the contribution now made by informal carers.

If half of the most dependent elderly people have to go into residential care because of a fall in the carers' contribution, spending on services would need to rise by almost 200 per cent, or £18 billion.

The study is the most painstaking undertaken on the looming costs of care for Britain's ageing population, its conclusions have been used in shaping the recommendations of the royal commission on long-term care, due next month.

The commission is expected to call for a phased increase in the annual government spending of some £200 million, enabling all "personal" care to be declared free in a re-drawing of the line between what is free and what is means-tested.

Critics are already accusing the commission of underestimating the costs of this approach, and of having a poor grip on the economics. One commission member is believed to be writing a dissenting report.

However, when the majority report is published stress will be placed on its consistency with the costs study commissioned to inform policy review and development.

The study has been conducted by the personal social services research unit at Kent university. Researchers modelled the demand for long-term care, and its likely costs from 1996-2031, when the number of over-65s are projected to rise by 57 per cent, and over-85s by 79 per cent — necessitating a 61 per cent expansion of care provision.

Assuming modest annual increases in the real costs of services, overall care spending would need to go up 163 per cent by 2031 — 174 per cent in NHS expenditure, 124 per cent in social services and 173 per cent in private payments — compared to a forecast rise of 122 per cent in gross domestic product.

The researchers emphasise that these base projections are merely illustrative, and that the figures could fluctuate with certain variables.

If older people become more dependent — in other words, if longer life means living longer with disability — the costs could spiral. An annual increase of just 1 per cent in dependency rates would mean care provision needed to expand by not 61 per cent, but 121 per cent.

By the base projections alone, numbers of elderly people in residential or nursing care will rise from 407,000 to 666,000; numbers receiving domiciliary or home-care services will go up from 517,000 to 804,000; and those receiving community nursing will increase from 444,000 to 717,000.

The study concludes that the main pressure will fall on NHS budgets. But it says it will be affordable if government funding is allowed to rise faster than GDP.



Garry Kobs with a scale replica of the Titanic, at the International Model Show, Olympia, west London until Sunday. It will later be auctioned by Christie's PHOTOGRAPH MARTIN ARQUES

Hums bring whines and discontent

Martin Wainwright

A MYSTERIOUS world of hums and drones which can only be heard by women is baffling investigators on a north of England housing estate.

High-pitched whines and pulsating buzzes have prompted victims to keep diaries of at least three varieties of sounds.

Men have so far been immune. "It's a real mystery. There's definitely something out there," said Andrew Gilbert, deputy head of environmental health services in Warrington, Cheshire, which has investigated a dozen complaints.

The sounds, worst in bedrooms and on frosty nights, have struck a small area on the edge of Warrington, and investigators are beginning to get data on similar outbreaks as news spreads.

Women from Manchester rang Mr Gilbert yesterday, along with a Shropshire victim.

The hums were described as "enough to turn you into a nervous wreck," by Anne Hesom, 55, one of the Warrington "hearers" who has been tormented with noise abatement teams to try to isolate the source of the sounds. She said she is kept awake

by three separate noises, one of them faintly heard by a woman environmental health inspector but none recorded on monitoring tapes.

"It's been going on for 18 months and it's had such an effect on my life I'm going to move home," said Mrs Hesom yesterday. "It's very bad in the front bedroom, though my husband can't hear it at all. I'm absolutely sick of it."

"We've got into complications with complaints — such as are they hearing a noise or the noise? It's going to be a while before the file is closed," added Mr Gilbert.

Meningitis negligence claim

Audrey Gillan

A YOUNG mother is demanding an urgent inquiry following the death of her baby from meningitis after she was sent away from hospital and told to give the child Calpol.

Sarah Burns, 22, from Norbury, Croydon, claimed yesterday that her daughter, Lauren, nine months, died from meningitis less than 48 hours after a doctor at Croydon's Mayday Hospital said there was nothing to worry about.

Two days later, Ms Burns was forced to make the decision to turn off Lauren's life

support machine after she was told that her only child was brain dead.

Ms Burns says that the hospital was negligent and that she was treated as if she was an over-zealous mother rather than a woman with a very sick child.

Yesterday, Keith Ford, chief executive of Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust, expressed his sympathy and added that the child was not turned away. Instead it was suggested that Lauren be taken to Croydon, an evening illness clinic located within the hospital. "Together with Croydon, we will be seeing if lessons can be learned."

Ms Burns first became concerned when Lauren developed a temperature on December 16. When the child's temperature reached 104, she took her to Mayday's casualty department where she was eventually told that there were no visible signs of any serious illness and that it was probably a virus.

"We were only seen by an assessment nurse who did not examine her and sent us to their GP on site... He took her temperature and looked in her eyes, nose and throat and said there was no visible sign of anything and it was probably just a virus. He told me to give her Calpol and if she was no better by morning then bring her back."

Planning a Millennium garden to keep the world green

Tim Radford, Science Editor

IT STARTED as the first garden of its kind in the 20th century. It will open in 2000 as the first garden of its kind of the new millennium. The 244 million National Botanic Garden of Wales, now taking shape near Llanarthne in Dyfed, is a different kind of

growth, according to its director, Charles Stirton.

Its grounds are already a secure home to rare and threatened species of lichen and fungus, and to some of the rarest bat species in Europe. Its great glasshouse will enclose not just plant collections but an entire Mediterranean ecosystem. Mediterranean — to botanists — describes the climate not just of Sicily or

Tunisia but of Cape Town, Chile, California and parts of Australasia.

"This is less than 2 per cent of the earth's surface, yet it has 20 per cent of the world's plant species. The lowland areas are very seriously threatened by agriculture and invasive weeds. It is an ecosystem under threat," says Prof Stirton. The garden is taking shape

in 568 acres of the Middleton Hall estate, with a £22 million grant from the Millennium Commission. It will be the first national botanic garden in the UK for 200 years, says Prof Stirton, and it will be different in both concept and execution.

Gardens like Kew were cathedrals to science, driven by imperial expansion, monuments to economic botany and a kind of obsessive collector's passion. The garden of Wales, however, has its roots in concern for the diversity of animal and plant life that became the focus of the 1992 Rio Summit, attended by Prof Stirton.

"I remember sitting there thinking, how if one only had a chance to build a new institution from scratch, with a fundamentally different approach, it would be nice — not thinking that four or five years later I would be doing exactly that."

The garden grew out of new ways of looking at the planet. "We decided that in 20 or 30 years time we wanted to be completely independent. So instead of just having a steady green boiler for our great glasshouse we decided to look at energy across the

entire site. So not only do we now have our own heaters to provide hot water for the glasshouses, we also have our own 'living machine' that cleans all our effluent, and in phase two we are looking for other forms of energy derivation: we want to generate all our own electricity by whatever means possible."

The design, however, somehow chose itself. The great glasshouse, home to 10,000 plants, emerged as a shape which echoes the contours of the surrounding hills. "The broad walk isn't a straight line, it's a meander, it's actually an analogue of the Towy valley river system about three miles away."

"The landscape architects didn't consciously do that: it was a slow process of interaction."

How much do media agendas across the world vary as the century ends? You might be surprised

1998: More than just Monica

Guardian reporters in cities around the globe examine media priorities in 1998. A former White House intern may have grabbed column inches everywhere, but each country had one big domestic issue that dominated debate:

United States

THE American press is rarely united but newspapers all agree — not surprisingly — that 1998 was the year of Monica Lewinsky.

A poll this week of editors and television executives by the Associated Press elicited scarcely a dissenting voice.

The year's second biggest story in the eyes of the US media was the baseball duel between Mark McGwire of the St Louis Cardinals and Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs. They were competing to hit the most home runs in a single season. McGwire won the honours with 70.

Global economic turmoil was seen as the year's third most important story. The deadly hurricanes Georges and Mitch and the running confrontation with Iraq also featured prominently.

China

BEIJING'S press had no doubt what was the biggest story of 1998: China's "twisting, dashing diplomacy". President Bill Clinton came to pay tribute to Jiang Zemin and was rewarded with a televised "democracy debate". President Jiang visited Moscow and Tokyo to set up new "partnerships" with countries which once dictated terms to Beijing.

Only in Hong Kong did a few voices dissent. Hopes for Chinese democracy were dashed by sentences imposed on peaceful dissidents. The People's Daily took a calm view of the Asian economic crisis, and China celebrated 20 years of economic reform.

France

THE French media are unanimous that the news event of the year was the French football team's 3-0 World Cup win over Brazil. The main television channel, TF1, re-ran the



The sordid saga of Bill Clinton and his affair with Monica Lewinsky was big news everywhere

match as the cornerstone of its Christmas fare while Le Figaro measured the impact on the young. Nearly 80 per cent voted the victory the high point of 1998, well ahead of the second choice, the screening of Titanic.

While the Lewinsky affair dominated foreign news, by December the single currency was the front-page lead in at least one national paper each day with Le Monde predicting a boom and France-Sol warning that the currency could prove an economic Titanic.

Germany

GERHARD Schröder's election triumph on September 27, ending 16 years of rule by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, was

the defining event for the German media. But newspaper pundits are already giving Mr Schröder short shrift and warning him to get his act together in 1999.

"Schröder, Fischer et al have still to show where they are on the fundamental issues of German politics and on the key questions of domestic and foreign policy," said Stern magazine.

The country's worst rail disaster in June, when 102 people died in the Eschede train tragedy was the saddest moment of the year.



French victory in the World Cup in July gave Zinedine Zidane, centre, and Marcel Desailly, right, something to smile about and the French press plenty to write about. Among the young it was the high point of the year, beating even the screening of Titanic

Italy

ITALY'S success in making the euro 11, Europe's financial first team, was the good news story of the year.

The birth in October of the government of the ex-communist Massimo D'Alema was the most momentous domestic event. But observers have been sceptical about his chances of survival.

The Lewinsky affair became compulsory reading for many Italians. Newspaper commentators marvelled that sexual peccadilloes could have such an explosive effect on Anglo-Saxon politics.

Israel

ISRAEL'S year was preoccupied with the slow disintegration of the government in the face of bitter divisions over the peace process with the Palestinians.

When the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, finally yielded on December 20 to pressure for early elections, the relief was palpable.

"Goodbye Bibi," the Yediot Aharonot newspaper said in a banner front-page headline. A week earlier President Clinton was in Gaza, the first visit by a sitting United States president to the Palestinian Authority territories. It was also Israel's 50th anniversary, but the celebrations only brought in sharper focus the rifts in society. Many Israelis

found it easier to applaud their successes in the Eurovision Song Contest and the Miss World pageant.

Russia

THERE is no argument about the story that still dominates Russia's front pages: the August 17 collapse of the country's post-Soviet financial system, the runs on failing banks, the crash of the rouble and the humiliation of market reformers.

"The previous generation used to talk about before and after the war," said Russian television. "The present generation will talk about before and after August 17." The chaos diminished Boris Yeltsin and brought in a

new prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov, to replace the young Sergei Kiriyenko. Mr Yeltsin's appointment of Mr Kiriyenko in March baffled the media.

There was little space for foreign news. As the year drew to a close, Russia was shaken by the assassination of the radical liberal MP Gailina Starovoltova. The killing, the media lamented, showed that the country was not just broke but ever more lawless and retreating to its dark past.

South Africa

FOR many South Africans the enduring legacy of 1998 was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report on apartheid-era crimes. The

sum of two years of confessions, accusations, bitterness and, sometimes, forgiveness was called by Johannesburg's Mail and Guardian "a crowning moment".

South Africa's invasion of Lesotho was officially called an intervention to forestall a coup. What is remembered is how ill-prepared the South African army was for the resistance it met.

Year-end photograph collections celebrated a touching moment: Nelson Mandela's marriage to Graca Machel. Reports by Mark Tran in New York, John Gittings in Hong Kong, Paul Webster in Paris, Ian Traynor in Bonn, Philip Willm in Rome, David Sharrock in Jerusalem, James Meek in Moscow, and Chris McGreal in Johannesburg.

Turkey tells Greeks not to put missiles on Crete

Chris Morris in Ankara

TURKEY warned yesterday that a proposal to deploy Russian-made anti-aircraft missiles on the Greek island of Crete could lead to a dangerous escalation of tension between the two Nato allies.

The S-300 missiles were bought by the Cypriot government last year and Turkey threatened military retaliation if they were deployed on Cyprus, where Turkey has stationed more than 30,000 troops in the breakaway Turkish-Cypriot republic in the north of the island.

Under strong international pressure, the Greek Cypriot president, Glafos Clerides, backed down on Tuesday night.

He announced that the missiles would not be sent to Cyprus and, after consultations with the Greek govern-

ment, he suggested Crete as an alternative destination.

The Turkish foreign minister, Ismail Cem, said that the Cypriot decision was a victory for Turkey's strong stand, but that the threat was not yet over.

"The plan to deploy S-300s on Crete would increase an already dangerous situation in the Aegean region," he said. "I think it would be totally wrong for one member of Nato to bring in missiles to threaten another Nato country."

Turkish officials argue that deploying a major Russian weapons system within Nato's borders is a bad idea because Russian technicians will have to help set up the system and the missile radar will allow Russia to monitor Nato activity throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

The Cyprus conflict has been dominated by the missile issue for much of the past two

years, and opinion seems to have hardened on both sides.

The Greek Cypriot government is still recognised internationally as the government of the whole island. But Cyprus has been divided into Greek and Turkish zones for more than 20 years and Turkey insists that the existence of two equal states must be accepted before there can be further negotiations on a settlement.

International mediators say the Turkish proposal is unrealistic. The United States and Britain were quick to welcome Mr Clerides's decision and they have backed a new United Nations attempt to demilitarise the island.

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots say the recent UN resolutions are an attempt to compensate Mr Clerides, who faces domestic criticism for backing down.

Leader, page 9

Beaten wives challenge custom

David Gough reports from Nairobi on how Kenyan women are forcing a taboo into the open

THE photographs of Betty Kavata lying dying in hospital after being beaten by her policeman husband would have shaken the conscience of most people.

But in Kenya, where customs condone, even encourage, wife beating, the newspaper pictures had particular impact. Recent high-profile domestic violence cases have forced a taboo subject into the open and led women's rights groups to pit statute against custom.

The World Health Organisation recently found that 42 per cent of women in Kenya were regularly beaten by their husbands.

Anne Murugu of the

Kenyan branch of Fida, the Federation of Women Lawyers, believes the true figure is closer to 70 per cent.

"There is a wall of silence surrounding the issue of domestic violence even though it is so widespread," she said, adding that matters were made worse by an institutionalised reluctance on the part of the police and judiciary to tackle the issue.

Adelina Mwau of the Coalition on Violence against Women (Covaw) said: "We are trying to break the silence and bring violence out of the home and into the public eye."

She said domestic violence was so common because women needed to be disci-

plined. She added that the practice was condoned by customary law and was so entrenched that many women believed that if their husband did not beat them it was a sign that they did not love them.

Covaw has done much to publicise the case of Betty Kavata, whose policeman husband took a brick to her head one drunken night in July. She lay brain damaged and paralysed in hospital until her death on Christmas Day.

Her sister, Rose Mutuku, has been fighting since July to have charges brought against her brother-in-law.

After months of petitioning by Ms Mutuku, Felix Thwaite was eventually suspended from his job on half pay a month ago, before his wife's death. He has only now been arrested and charged with murder.

Ms Murugu said the justice system favoured the

husband. She cited a recent case where a senior magistrate sentenced a 70-year-old man to death for robbery and on the same day reduced murder charge in a domestic violence case to manslaughter.

In reducing the charge the magistrate was report-

'Custom is simply used as an excuse for violence'

ed to have said: "This is the African man's way of disciplining his wife."

But in another case, a woman of the Masai tribe, which still lives very much in accordance with customary law, brought criminal and civil proceedings against her husband who

had beaten her for 13 years.

A court recently found her husband guilty of assault. Her lawyer brother, Kerikako Tobiko, is preparing to take her case to the high court in an attempt to have wife-beating declared unconstitutional.

Fida is backing the action because it believes that the defence of customary law is being used as an excuse for violence. The number of wife-beating cases reported to the police increased by 50 per cent between 1994 and 1996, and Ms Murugu believes this is due to a deterioration in economic circumstances.

"If battery was consistent with traditional beliefs then one would expect the number of cases to be relatively consistent. The fact that it is on the increase shows that the violence is motivated by other factors and custom is simply used as an excuse," she said.

Taiwan firm 'sorry' for Cambodia toxic dump

John Gittings in Hong Kong

THE Taiwan company responsible for shipping a consignment of toxic waste to Cambodia has finally apologised, nearly two weeks after the incident triggered riots and a panic-stricken exodus from the port where the waste was dumped.

The giant Formosa Plastics Corporation said yesterday it was sorry for "causing disturbance" to the Cambodian people. But it is still resisting pressure by the embarrassed Taiwan government to ship back the nearly 3,000 tons of mercury-laced waste.

Laboratory tests by foreign experts have given widely different readings for the mercury content, although all are above the safe minimum. Formosa said it would send a team to the port of Sihanoukville to take more samples.

Local news reports now suggest that the poisonous waste was spread more widely in Sihanoukville than origi-

nally thought. It was transported to a dump outside the city in 90 uncovered trucks working for at least four days. Many of the trucks, according to the Phnom Penh Post, were cleaned beside a large reservoir which supplies drinking water.

Local people are said to have used the waste for landfill and to have salvaged the plastic bags in which it was carried.

"Some used the plastic bags for their rice or in their homes," reporters were told. "One man used the waste blocks as hearth stones on which to light his cooking fire."

Stories of waste being dumped secretly at sea and of "secret dumps" at other locations fanned alarm.

The local community held a public demonstration on December 19 during which a shipping agency office was sacked and one person died. Four more people died in a panic flight of nearly 50,000

Sihanoukville residents in the next three days.

A dock worker who unloaded the toxic waste ship has also died, with symptoms claimed to be those of mercury poisoning.

On Monday Taiwanese officials said an analysis of samples taken by an environmental group showed the waste was more toxic than allowed by law, and they ordered Formosa Plastics to return the material to Taiwan.

The mercury emission level of the waste was 0.294 parts per million, compared to the safety standard of 0.2 ppm, according to the analysis.

The level refers to the mercury that can be emitted from the waste when placed in a natural environment.

Formosa Plastics questioned the analysis and decided to conduct its own sampling.

The Taiwanese press reported an analysis made by a Japanese expert showed the waste had a mercury content

level as high as 4,000 parts per million and could be hazardous to humans.

The incident has added to environmentalists' concern that parts of Asia are becoming a dumping ground for toxic wastes — much of it generated by the more developed countries in the region.

The list includes banned pesticides, waste oils, heavy metals and medical waste. Cambodia and Indonesia are the worst affected. Other dangerous waste, such as lead-acid batteries, is sent from Western countries for recycling. A report last year from the East-West Centre in Honolulu said it would cost millions of dollars just to research the extent of the problem.

Anger in Sihanoukville is fuelled by suspicion that the imports of toxic waste have been eased by payments to corrupt officials. A plan to build a huge industrial incinerator in the city, approved in principle by the prime minister, Hun Sen, is now on hold.

John Gittings in Hong Kong

CHINA'S economy has grown by an amazing 7.8 per cent in the midst of Asia's economic decline, according to figures released yesterday in Beijing. The figure comes conveniently close to the official target of an 8 per cent increase in GDP for 1998, and was hailed by the Chinese press yesterday as a "remarkable" achievement.

Economic observers do not deny that China has done well and that the economy continues to grow. The sound performance will help China to defend its currency against pressures for devaluation.

Yesterday Beijing repeated its pledge not to devalue the renminbi in 1999.

But there is concern about the quality of the investment poured into the economy in the past few months to pump up the figures. There are also doubts about the accuracy of some statistics.

"We do not rule out that in compiling data in certain

regions some figures were padded and false reports were made," said Ye Zhen of the State Statistical Bureau. But he insisted that the final figures were reliable.

China's performance is all the more impressive because it achieved only a 7 per cent growth in the first half of the year, and exports remained at the previous year's level instead of continuing to grow as expected. The prime minister, Zhu Rongji, staked his reputation on meeting the 8 per cent GDP growth target.

Yesterday's figure is close enough to save his face. Mr Ye said the achievement of growth despite the Asian crisis and China's disastrous summer floods reflected "the joint struggles of the people".

More prosaically, it is the result of massive state spending on infrastructure — roads, telecommunications and irrigation — which has pumped up the economy in the second half of the year.

Experts acknowledge that this has helped to create jobs and keep key industries in

business. But nearly all the investment is being channelled through the less-than-efficient state sector, and the long-term value of some of the projects is debatable.

Declarations of intent to reform the state sector have become more cautious in recent months as priorities shift towards keeping the econ-

omy afloat. Value-added industrial output, which excludes the cost of raw materials, is said to have grown by 8.8 per cent during the year.

The statistical bureau insists that — contrary to experts' suspicions — goods are not simply piling up outside state-owned factories. The figures for industrial stock-

piles show no increase over the whole year — even though they had risen by more than 9 per cent halfway through 1998.

China Daily, while hailing the result yesterday, warned that the real stumbling-block might be "an ever-increasing deflationary trend in the economy". The retail price index fell in October for the first time, and slumped in November by 2.5 per cent.

"China has encountered an economic problem it has never run across before," said Yuan Gangming of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Deflation was "a harder nut to crack", and the domestic market was faced with a glut of goods produced by inefficient industry.

Urban incomes rose 6.6 per cent this year, according to the official figures, while rural incomes were up 4 per cent. But Chinese consumers are wary of spending because of new financial burdens.

Health and education are no longer provided at low cost, and housing reforms have led to higher rents.

010

Ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the population in Kosovo, have set up their own, poorly funded, parallel system of health care.

The World's No.1 Building Society

[illegible]

Comment

Diary
Matthew
Norman

As we left the Diary Awards luncheon yesterday, an outbreak of hostilities between Sir Bernard Ingham and Michael Winner had forced a suspension of 30 minutes. When we recovered over Armagnac and cigars, the panel started with the Little Gun Gum Silver Hamburger for Good Parenting. Here we yielded to the expertise of Michael Winner, who reminded us how he spent many years trying to sue his own mother, and unashamedly gave the award to Rupert Murdoch. Interviewed in Tatler his daughter Elisabeth mentioned how, when she was a child, the family had a dairy farm in Epping Forest on which they kept two miniature horses... "my pride and joy," she recalled, "until they were given away to some News of the World readers." What a lovely man he is.

THE Tiananmen Tankard for Tolerating Dissent. Following his PR triumph over the Chris Patten book, Rupert had strong claims here as well, but Paul Johnson insisted the tankard should go elsewhere. "No one," he said, "takes constructive criticism better than my protégé Tony Blair." Rosie Boycott concurred, citing Mr Tony's menacing remark at a Blackpool conference reception that "the Guardian needs sorting out," while Sir Bernard admired Downing Street's ranking system for all Guardian staff (anyone to the left of Gordon Brown is "a Trot"; everyone else is "a wanker"; I, you will recall, have the honour to be the one and only "****").

MISSPRINT of the Year: Rosie Boycott, whose relations with the Chancellor's camp suffered when she drew a job offer to Paul Routledge, sought to build bridges by selecting this from Sunday Business. "Our Wednesday edition referred to Gordon Brown's plans for Cheating A Fair Society. This should have read Creating A Fair Society."

THE Manning Medallion for Services to Anti-Racism. Although Dariusz Howe earned a shortlisting for his delightful address to a white reporter on the newspaper the Nation ("I'll get a shotgun and stick it up your arse, your white arsehole"), the winner yet again is Taki-George. Of his myriad contributions to the cause of racial harmony, the judges picked out his thoughtful words about the baby born to Richard Ingham's girlfriend Deborah Bosely. "The black neighbour and natural father is keen to be involved with the upbringing of the child," wrote the Cypriot in the Spectator last January. "Good for Sambo... Go for it, Sambo, you'd be doing the kid a favour."

THE Paul Johnson Mauder. Lying in the sole gift of my sane and rational friend, this honours rigid consistency in public life. Paul commended Kenneth Starr for sticking by his 1994 pronouncement: "Our society should be purged of the pervers who provide the media with pornographic material while pretending it has some redeeming value under the public's 'right to know'." But the jacket went to Bill Clinton for adhering to the spirit of these 1974 words, spoken of Richard Nixon. "Yes, the President should resign. He has lied to the American people and has betrayed their trust... Since he has admitted guilt, there is no need to put the American people through an impeachment. The only possible solution is for this President to save dignity and resign."

IN strict truth, 1998 was a troublesome year for our judges. Paul Johnson was outed, of course, as a spackee by the paper edited by Rosie Boycott, who herself suffered the trauma of having fishfingers buried under her bath... an event that had her sobbing down the telephone when we rang. Given all this, we thank them for sparing the time, and look forward to following their progress through what will, we hope, be a more serene 1999.

National Blood Shortage—New Hope...

DON'T WORRY, TONY! I'VE GOT ANOTHER 300 GALLONS TO SPARE...



Behold the future when our leaders will be nothing less than saints

Hugo
Young



THE successful politician of the new century will be, unless we think again, apparently a saint. He or she will have no past. There won't be a single personal frailty the candidate would be happy to see paraded before the world. There will have been, of course, no adultery, not even secretly. There will be no dubious connections, no sniff of the gambler, no imprudent borrowing, nothing that might import into politics the faintest trace of the corner-cutting and risk-taking that makes economies function. Every friend will have to be vetted for a similar state of sanctity.

Welcome to the only conclusion to be drawn from the column-inch preoccupations of 1998. The politics of the personal has carried all before it. One can see this as the triumph of a new and cleansing morality, directed against the crooks and hypocrites who would otherwise be running the country. Or one can see it as the most pernicious kind of puritanism, raising the entry threshold against people of calibre who might do great things for the public good, distracting attention to the fringes while the heart of the republic withers.

Bill Clinton is a chronic deceiver, and, as such, Time magazine's Man of the Year. His political career was from the start a triumph of ambition over principle. The personal habit of betrayal became so pervasive that his public life can hardly be insulated from it. Yet one might say even in the case of Clinton, that the expectations of private sainthood, which he publicised, were what caused him to deliver ever more fatally into his scholastic store of perjuries.

Nor is Clinton's grossness

redeemed by a dazzling political record. This is not a great man with a little weakness. Unlike David Lloyd George, of distant British memory, this philanderer doesn't bestir a land and time where his leadership is irreplaceable. Equally, the lesser sully of Peter Mandelson doesn't mark the departure of a titan. There may be few regrets, either for the President on his way out or for the Minister who will surely return. On the other hand, these outcomes are not clean. There's a case to register against the new, chronic, deadly judgmentalism of the age.

The disease has several sources. The politics of the personal is an indulgence made possible by the suspension of the politics of survival. When leaders could bring the world to an end, their personal traits, paradoxically, were of less interest than they are now. We concentrated on the main question, and Kennedy's mistresses did not matter. The leader had a job to do that was awesomely clear. Now, not only has that clarity disappeared, but the clarity of ideology has vanished as well.

With communism and socialism liquidated, in other words, where, any longer, is the real drama? When everyone's a centre-right pragmatist, the ratings of the contenders' blow-dry and sincerity-gauges, along with the bromide normality they want to claim for their private lives, take on ridiculous importance. Though there are some big political arguments in Britain—more than in America—the reach of the semi-liberal economic consensus is so broad that the personality of the leader entrusted with it has become far more important than the substance of the message

which, in any case, he strives to make as uncontentious as he can. Playing on this pain-free world are the moralising media. The media's demand for transparency, coupled with their horror for the imperfection it exposes, produces a savage cocktail of righteousness. The characters of public people are scanned here, in the name of standards that often lack all proportion. The presumption of guilt sprays derision on public service, especially when rich men are involved. When no firm charge can be substantiated, no crime shown, the modern Torquemada says that what matters is not the substance but the appearance of the thing. Don't you see, Prime Minister, that it looks bad: that people are talking: that appearance, when image is everything, is quite enough—even though the facts prove nothing, and appearance, in any case, is nothing more or less than what we, your inquisitors, choose to present?

SOME of this is necessary. There are some crooks in politics. Taking cash for questions is poison, and conflicts of interest need diminishing via exposure. As Lloyd George said, most people at the top of politics could have made 10 times more by going into business. But that doesn't alter the fact that business, when it enters politics, is never innocent. A few years ago, a generous man may finance his party and its people in selfless pursuit of what he thinks is the common good. A corporation would be bliking its shareholders if it gave away a single penny without ulterior motive. Blairite Labourism is naive about this, blindly believing itself incapable of being corrupted. The politico-business complex needs constant watching. On the other hand, we do not need wholly virtuous men about us. Politicians should be allowed some vices. Give me, for example, a leader who is not pleased by the fine honed technique of polite whispering behind closed doors. Amongst the year end reviews, there has been a disappointing official silence on the achievements of quiet diplomacy so, since 1998 is almost upon us, we must add up the balance sheet on our own.

It has certainly been a good year for Beijing. The Chinese regime has received so many plaudits for its improved handling of human rights that it has been able to celebrate at the close of the year with a wave of repression so severe that, if we didn't know better, we would think ourselves back in the late 1970s. Next June will see the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In the wake of that event, China was shunned internationally and the US began to sponsor an annual attempt to bring a resolution critical of China before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

This year that policy was abandoned. The explanation of this extraordinary state of affairs was the great improvement in China's human rights record brought about by quiet diplomacy. China has learned to play this game, and understands the need to toss a bone from time to time to the eager Western politicians who argue her case for her around the world.

THUS, at the end of 1997, China signed the UN covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. Early in 1998, she promised to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines the freedoms of speech, assembly and religion and equality in October, the convention was duly signed. Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, visited China, the first time such a dignitary had been allowed to inspect the situation on the ground. British lawyers were dispatched to instruct the Chinese in the virtues of a properly functioning legal system, in which the accused might be entitled to a defence. There were even some highly publicised releases

almost never.

Other human failings are good, not bad, for politics. Of the seven deadly sins, in fact, only two seem disabling to a public office-holder. In a world without the phony pieties now dominating our discourse, envy, lust and gluttony would be perfectly consistent with being Minister of all Portfolios. Pride and wrath, both plausible motives of ambition, far from being unacceptable, seem essential perquisites. Sloth and avarice alone look like proper disqualifications from public life. Otherwise, beware the anathemas of pyromania.

I resolve to do my bit for the betterment of things in 1999 by not forgetting it. God save Lord Irvine of Lairg.

A year of quiet diplomacy ends with more arrests of dissidents

Chinese whispers

Isabel
Hilton



QUIET diplomacy triumphed in 1998. This, of course, is the theory that the sensitive souls who rule China are offended by public rebuke and can best be dissuaded from abusing their citizens by the finely honed technique of polite whispering behind closed doors. Amongst the year end reviews, there has been a disappointing official silence on the achievements of quiet diplomacy so, since 1998 is almost upon us, we must add up the balance sheet on our own.

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into exile of prisoners of conscience. Quiet diplomacy was clearly working... for China, at least.

But only ten weeks after China signed the convention, it is clear that such gestures are not going to make a scrap of difference. A few days ago, China's president and Communist Party chairman Jiang Zemin made a speech: "From beginning to end," he told the nation, "we must be vigilant against infiltration, subversive activities and separatist activities of international and domestic hostile forces. The Western mode of political systems must never be copied."

In the last three weeks, the latest attempt to open up China's forced and corrupt political system to internal debate has been smashed. Three activists of the China Democratic Party, Qin Yongmin, Xu Wenli and Wang Youcai were sentenced to between 11 and 13 years in prison for daring to call for the rights to which China had signed up in the two UN conventions. Qin and Xu are both veterans of Democracy Wall. Wang earned his prison stripes from Tiananmen.

Their crime, according to the government, was that they tried to register their party they had endangered the mighty Chinese state. Foreign ministry spokesman, Zhu Bangzao said: "Other countries, should refrain from making irresponsible remarks about China's judicial system." So much for China's commitment, under the covenants, to submit to international assessment.

This attempt to open up a corrupt system has been smashed

International assessment. Six more party members, are under arrest, and the sense of menace is unmistakable.

In Beijing last week, a group of some 30 artists and writers, who have been meeting on a weekly basis to discuss politics and current affairs, was shut down. France and the US have been shamed into protest; Germany is shocked; Britain disappointed. The four nations that professed themselves most committed about quiet diplomacy seem hurt and bewildered at its unaccountable failures.

Never mind. After all, 1999 is another year and, as usual there will be a meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Beijing's usual technique on these occasions is to let someone out of jail. Perhaps what we have been seeing in the last few weeks is not so much a crackdown as a prudent stockpiling of high-profile dissidents to be released when the occasion demands. It's an old trick but so far, it has worked a treat.

The Government won't stop Irish prisoner releases, as the Tories want. We shall stick to the Good Friday Agreement.

We can celebrate

Mo Mowlam

NORTHERN Ireland has a lot to celebrate. 1998 has been a year of achievement, topped by the Good Friday Agreement and the resounding Yes vote in the May referendum. People in Northern Ireland should rightly feel proud of themselves and their politicians for what they have accomplished together.

Of course there are still many anxieties. The pain is still there from the horrific killing of 29 people at Omagh in August. But, I have no doubt that the people of Northern Ireland want this Agreement to work. And once again their political leaders have delivered.

Before Christmas—after another long night of negotiation—the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government achieved a major breakthrough on

North/South issues. This agreement on new arrangements for North-South co-operation and implementation, was supposed to happen by October 31. That deadline was missed—as others have been in the past and, no doubt will be in the future—but the substantive progress is there nevertheless.

Decisions were also made on the structure of departments for the future government of Northern Ireland. A consistent feature of the work in recent months has been preparing people—both politicians and officials—for the transfer of power from Westminster to locally elected representatives.

There is still a lot of important practical work to be done following these agreements. But that can still be achieved within the first months of 1999. We must continue to build the political confidence that all parts of the

Agreement will be implemented. The decision to start decommissioning taken by the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) is a welcome step forward. We have now witnessed the first illegal guns destroyed by an electric grinder. All other paramilitary groups should now follow suit.

The decommissioning of paramilitary weapons is a clear obligation—an essential part of the Good Friday Agreement. But the Agreement did not make it a precondition for progress in other areas, and the Government is not about to start unravelling what the parties agreed.

We are preparing for the inaugural meeting of the new British-Irish Council. Chris Patten's commission on policing has been attending meetings across Northern Ireland—listening to local people. At the

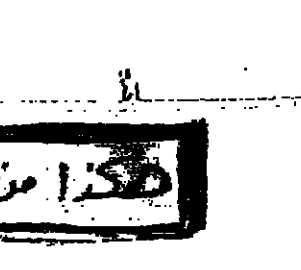
same time, a review of the general criminal justice system is under way.

Who would have thought a few years ago that Northern Ireland would be leading the way in the areas of equality and human rights? But it is

true. Under the Agreement, two independent commissions will monitor and enforce what will be one of the most advanced legal frameworks in Europe for protecting basic rights and combating discrimination.

Also in accordance with

the Agreement, prisoner releases are continuing only for groups maintaining complete and unequivocal ceasefires. Some 220 Loyalist and republican prisoners have been released on licence so far. Were the Government to stop prisoner releases on any pretext other than the ceasefires having broken down—as the Tories are pressing us to—we would be in breach of the Agreement.



The process of early releases is difficult, both politically and morally. It is most difficult of all for the victims of violence and their families. Their needs have not been forgotten. A special report was published in May, informed by many hours and days of listening to those who have suffered most through Northern Ireland's troubles.

Its recommendations are being acted upon, including a memorial fund set up

with £1 million of Government support to help victims who are suffering financial hardship. Other difficult issues are being tackled too. The inquiry into 11 and events of Bloody Sunday in 1972 will continue its work in 1999. We look forward to hearing its conclusions.

The annual marches and parades—and the protests against them—have generated their own difficulties and tragedies this year. As far as parades in Fermanagh are concerned, the issue remains worryingly unresolved.

But the progress made between Northern Ireland's political leaders should give us confidence that if we maintain the momentum towards peace and stability, through the Agreement, these and other difficulties can be overcome.

Mo Mowlam is Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

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The euro has landed

It is bound to affect us too

TODAY at 11.30am a truly historic event will take place in Brussels. The finance ministers of the 11 countries joining monetary union will lock their currencies together at an irrevocably fixed rate. This is the real birth of the euro, though the official start is tomorrow. Actual dealings in Europe's first fixed currency since the Romans won't start until Monday because of the holidays — though Australia will steal a march by trading on Sunday night.

Everyone, sceptics included, will wish the euro well. Member countries have suffered great privation — and high unemployment — to sweat their budget deficits down to the 3 per cent of GDP agreed at Maastricht. It was all done in the cause of a noble economic dream that is now a reality. If the project is successful the prizes will be considerable: higher growth, low interest rates, the elimination of transaction costs and the creation of a trading and currency zone to take on the dollar. If it is seen to be successful, much of the scepticism in Britain may wane. The most recent Gallup survey showed 77 per cent of British people are either opposed to the project or want to wait to see if it succeeds. Yet 80 per cent believe in the inevitability of Britain joining sooner or later. Many of those who have grave reservations about the project, including the Guardian, are nevertheless still strongly pro-European. Now that the euro is up and running it is vital that everyone, no matter what their beliefs, tries hard

to make it work. For Europe it is now the only show in town.

What can be done? The main structural weakness of the experiment (leaving aside the extra ones posed by UK membership) is that the "one cap for all" approach to interest rates could lead to serious fissures among Euroland countries if, say, interest rates have to be raised to prevent overheating in Germany and France while Spain and Portugal want lower rates. In order to mitigate the potentially destructive consequences, member countries will have to move towards even smaller budget deficits than the 3 per cent Maastricht ceiling. This will be needed to generate resources (that Brussels doesn't yet have) to tackle local unemployment by fiscal means now that the levers of monetary policy have been handed over to a European central bank which doesn't even have a remit to promote growth and employment. (That must change too). The EU must also work towards the sort of labour (and language) flexibility that enables workers in the US to seek work in other areas when one region is suffering.

No one should pretend that we will know in a year or two if the euro is a success. Europe is still emerging from a long recession (and was hit by the Asian crisis when it was finding its feet). Unemployment is over 10 per cent and will remain there (according to the OECD) at least until 2000. The economy of Euroland will be recovering for several years for cyclical reasons. We may know if the project fails (if, say, a member country attempts to pull out) before we have time to know whether it succeeds. History may show that the attempt to use monetary union as a means to achieve integration — rather than the prize for achieving it — may be misconceived. But all that is for the future.

Everything must be done to make the project a success for the eleven. And if British membership is a near-inevitability then we had better be prepared for it when it comes. Meanwhile we may be surprised how far the euro infiltrates the UK even if we don't join, a process the Government could expedite if it endorsed the euro as a parallel currency. As Lord Hollick put it: "Although you can keep Britain out of the euro, you can't keep the euro out of Britain."

Missiles moved

But Cyprus is no nearer peace

THE FOLLY of trying to achieve diplomatic ends through military means has been often demonstrated. Now comes the turn of the Greek Cypriots to learn that lesson. President Glafkos Clerides said in 1997 that his government had ordered advanced surface-to-air missiles from Russia because it needed them to improve its defences against possible Turkish attack. In reality, Clerides probably committed himself to the missiles because he thought the order would add to the pressure on the UN, the United States, and European countries to find a solution to the Cyprus problem.

If this was the strategy, the results have been the opposite of what was intended. The Turkish Cypriots instantly responded by saying that, as far as they were concerned, the missiles were not on the bargaining table in any reunification talks. The impact on Turkey was literally explosive. Ankara declared it would blast the missiles out of their positions if they were ever installed. The potential for war in the eastern Mediterranean was clear to everybody, including the hapless Clerides, and

diplomats have been working to avoid the deployment ever since.

The solution which has supposedly been found is to park the missiles in Crete, where they can make no difference to the military balance in Cyprus, 600 miles away, and not much to that between Greece and Turkey. Whether they will actually ever reach Crete is an open question. The climb-down has been a long time coming. It will blight what remains of Clerides' career.

He was narrowly elected in February to another term as president, with his "tough" line on missiles probably securing him the edge in the contest. All that posturing looks pretty sick now and the Socialists, who are part of the ruling coalition, are threatening to leave it. To be fair to Clerides, it was not his missiles policy which undermined any advance toward a Cyprus solution and limited progress on entry into the European Union. The main cause has been the general deterioration of relations between Turkey and Europe, following the EU decision to push Turkey toward the back of the membership queue. Clerides has tried to cover himself by saying that he has been assured there will be new efforts at a Cyprus solution. It is true that the United Nations is about to have another go, but the prospects, sadly, are not good, even with the Russian missiles finally out of the picture.

Lords reform

Is a civil service fixer the man?

THE POINT of Lords reform is — at least — to introduce new blood into a chamber of unaccountable ancients which in future has to do things differently. How impressive it would be, then, if the Government

started where it means to end and gave the job of rethinking the second chamber to someone different, from outside the charmed circles, someone able to think freshly and interestingly about the legislature and its relationship with the people. But no. By all accounts the Prime Minister has turned to Lord Butler of Brockwell.

As Cabinet Secretary Sir Robin Butler was, the ultimate insider. He's well equipped to craft some fudge, to broker between last-ditchers and Liberal Democrats. But is that what's wanted? And, of course, there's the small matter of Lord Butler's existing employment: he already has a full-time job. If Oxbridge colleges are going around telling the world they need extra to maintain the quality of their teaching, they need to behave like other professionally run higher-education institutions.

On the available evidence, he's not a Douglas Warr or John Hunt. While unquestionably clever, he has never thought conceptually about the state of the British state — his messages to his colleagues about their duties and responsibilities when he was head of the Civil Service were bland. We take it on trust that Lord Butler did a reasonable job in post. What we do know from the public record is Lord Butler's judgment of men and matters can be suspect. This is the high official who, on the basis of one public school gentleman to another, exonerated Jonathan Aitken; this is the top mandarin who appears never to have entertained a qualm over the ethical and accountability issues raised by Sir Richard Scott's arms-to-Iraq inquiry. Lord Butler has deep experience of the centre of Whitehall, but is that more of a disqualification than a recommendation for refashioning the nation's constitution and enhancing faith in democracy?

Letters to the Editor

Irvine sets the record straight

DAVID Hencke (Second blow for Robinson success, December 30) alleges that I intervened with the Prime Minister to block Geoff Hoon's appointment as Paymaster General, because of my need for him to pilot the Access to Justice and Lords' reform measures through the Commons. I had no such conversation with the Prime Minister. Nor would I ever stand in the way of the promotion of a highly talented minister.

Lord Irvine of Lairg.
The Lord Chancellor.

YET again these gung-ho yachting boys are having to be saved from disaster (Acceptable risks of a yacht classic, December 29). They not only endanger the lives of their rescuers, but also cost the taxpayer a bundle. If you can afford a yacht I feel you should be expected to fork out something towards your rescue instead of cashing in on your story when you get back. R Maynard.
London.

NOT long ago I had a guinea pig and a rabbit called Oscar and Tazzy. One sad night a fox broke into the run. We saw the fox killing them. Your article about pet mutilation (Last word in sadism, 23, December 23) is making lots of people with pets worried about nothing. It's bad enough being worried about foxes, let alone people.

My family found a new game over Christmas — working out the codes used on supermarket bills. It started with a bill from M&S showing £2.92. BLUE, 1002 BT SING. These turned out to be: Pizza Selection in a Blue box, and 1002 carton of Extra Thick Single Cream.
Susan Horn.
Reading, Berks.

Better off in Alcatraz

NEITHER stern talk from tougher laws will deter me from occasionally taking my children out of school in term time (Report, December 30). I am not lured by low-season prices. As a staff nurse, I work in a team made up nearly exclusively of fellow-parents. If we all took holidays to coincide with school breaks, the place would not survive (an adolescent psychiatrist, incidentally).

What particularly bothers me is the claim that our children's education suffers as a result of holidays taken in term time. Earlier this month I took my two daughters (12 and 10) to Holland for a week. Amongst other things we stood in awe before paintings by Kandinsky and Mondrian in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, and also experienced the Dutch way of celebrating Saint Nicholas on December 5. My wife regularly spends two months in her home country Hungary, with the girls, partly to help them keep up the bilingualism. No government minister or local headteacher (and no law) will ever define "good education" for me.
Peter Kaan.
Tepsham, Devon.

WE took our two sons (aged eight and five) to visit friends in California in October for three weeks. While we were there, we visited San Francisco and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and Alcatraz, and hiked in Yosemite National Park. In my opinion, this is just as educational, if not more so, than three weeks of school.

If Mr Blunkett really wants to solve the problem, promoting the four-term year, with holiday periods more evenly spaced and equal in length, would be a much better idea.
P Thomas.
Chilpenham, Wilts.

FOR many families the six-week peak summer period is prohibitively expensive — we have neither the friends of the Blair's nor the cost of the flights to the Seychelles. Our children do not have the extended holidays of the private schools and our work places put restrictions upon when we may take our annual leave. Just for once could we share the same world?
Marion Saunders.
Greenford, Middx.

APPLAUD David Blunkett. It is a problem which is increasing and represents

wide abuse of an old concession intended to permit family holidays where employers stipulated holiday periods for their workers. However, I too am sceptical of the chances of persuading travel companies to alter their pricing policies.

I would like to see the problem tackled differently. Using term time to take holidays sends a clear message to children about the value of education and about commitment to learning and work. Schools keep careful records of attendance, but little use is made of them. If employers and universities were to start asking applicants for details of school attendance, including unauthorised and holiday absence, the effect could be dramatic. Parents would have to think very hard before taking a decision that might affect their child's further education or employment opportunities.
Dr M J Sutton.
Headteacher, Woodbridge Primary School, Suffolk.

SURELY penalising all pack-holiday-makers for the sins of a few irresponsible parents amounts to collective punishment, which is banned under the Geneva Convention?
R Emmerson.
Selby, N Yorks.

It is astonishing that you do not even mention the plight of the Serbs who live in ancestral land, where armed mothers escort their children to school, and monks carry guns to protect themselves.
Dr Aleksandar Mijovic.
London.

We do not publish letters where only an e-mail address is supplied; please include a full postal address. We may edit letters. We regret we cannot acknowledge letters. Please provide a reference to the relevant article.



Why Mandelson won't be missed

JONATHAN Freedland (The prodigal son, December 24) finds it hard to understand why Peter Mandelson is so unpopular among the Labour grass roots.

Why should he be popular when he makes it quite clear that he has nothing in common with us? His attitude towards the struggling underclass of the lower paid, the hardly paid and the not paid at all, appears to be one of contempt.

From the start of the election that brought Labour to power, it was made quite clear that it was middle-class Britain whose support was required. The votes of the "lower orders" were neither needed nor wanted. Peter Mandelson exemplified this attitude which was certainly shared by Tony Blair; his advisers, spokesmen and newer MPs.

We have been reduced to being an audience for the puerile and petty vendettas of a group of semi-celebrities. The chairman or owner of "whatever" may be rich and powerful, but he has only one vote. We in the outback may be regarded as little more than compost — used when necessary, ploughed under when not, but we deliver the votes, in millions.

We aren't cool or modern.

(whatever that means) and we may not be good at ordering in the River Cafe. We struggle to be decent, thoughtful people, and show more honesty and ingenuity in getting by than the grovelling "loadsamoney" culture of the government we've lumbered ourselves with. We deserve more.
J Walby.
Oillingham.

AM on income support and housing benefit. Peter Mandelson now earns £243,000. The cost of servicing his debt to Mr Robinson is about £22,000, and I estimate his remaining mortgage at £12,000. If he's running a constituency home as well, he must now be living on a minus figure. My God, I'm ahead.
Jan Ratcliffe.
London.

OVER the last few days I have read of the various options open to Peter Mandelson. Some of these suggestions are: running for Mayor of London, boss of a pro-European lobbying organisation and making a film for Oxfam.

Not once have I heard mentioned the obvious work for an MP — consulting after the interests of his constituents.
WR Cocks.
Swindon.

Agency nurses — the health service's flexible friends

THE use of agency nurses in NHS wards (Nursing crisis in NHS wards, December 29) is more complex than it seems.

Traditionally hospitals maintained their own "banks" of nurses who can cover for colleagues on leave. Recently they have handed administrative responsibility to agencies such as the British Nursing Agency (BNA) for whom I now work. It may be more lucrative for nurses in London, but here BNA is contracted to provide staff at Whitley scale rates, in the lowest increment per grade.

Thus the hospital benefits from my 25 years experience at the rate they pay newly-qualified nurses, and at short notice. For me, the advantages are choosing where and when to work. I earn less, but have control over my life and enjoy nursing more.
Judy Gardner.
Shrewsbury.

YOUR statement that South Manchester University Trust has been unable to

recruit enough nurses to open a new 20-bed ward this winter is quite correct.

But we are providing extra beds, largely by admitting only NHS patients to our private unit. Those nurses we have recruited have started work on other wards, where existing staff are under pressure because of a flu outbreak, coupled with additional emergency patients. I pay tribute to all our staff who are doing a superb job under pressure.

We want to employ more nurses. Agency staff are a valuable, flexible workforce, but too great a reliance on them can lead to a lack of continuity of patient care. If we want the NHS to provide a higher percentage of permanent staff, we must use many initiatives to attract people into nursing at several levels, not just degree-based full qualification.
Jane Herbert.
Chief executive,
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Warwards fastest

Ian Aitken



UNTIL very recently it was a truth universally acknowledged that Scoop, Evelyn Waugh's great comic novel about the Abyssinian war, wasn't so much a satire on the British press as an all-too-accurate account of the foreign correspondent's game. Today is the 40th anniversary of the day I learned that lesson personally.

I was then working for Lord Beaverbrook, on whom

Waugh is alleged to have based his frightful Lord Copper. As New York correspondent for the Daily Express — a newspaper not vastly different from the Daily Beast — I could easily have been the model for Scoop's innocent hero, William Boot, except that the real one is still around in the person of Bill Deedes.

For reasons too Scoopish to explain, I was in Caracas at the end of my very first trip away from base. It had been a flop, and I needed a decent story to redeem myself. On the hotel news stand I found the answer — a front-page report of a big battle at a place called Santa Clara, with thousands of casualties, which would finish off the Cuban civil war.

Until then I hadn't really known there was a war in Cuba, for in those pre-Castro times the news value of a Latin American war came only slightly ahead of the proverbial small earthquake in Peru. Moreover, I wasn't

absolutely confident about where Cuba was, except that it was in the Caribbean. But I was desperate, so I called London to suggest that I drop in on this carnage on my way home.

This was, of course, long before satellite telephones, and we conducted most of our business by cable, resulting in a minor literary art form known as cableese.

So my message probably read something like: "Unpressed twentythousand dead cubawise stop suggest eye incall havana before releasing regards Ian."

With the inspired brevity characteristic of the then foreign editor, one Norman Smart, the reply read: "Okay warwards fastest regards smart." So warwards I went, and fastest.

My plane reached Havana late on December 31, 1958. Wary after a wild goose chase in the jungles of the Orinoco, I headed straight to the Hotel Nacional, ate a quick meal,

and left everyone else to celebrate Hogmanay while I went to bed. When I awoke it seemed that the revelries were still in progress, only louder.

Cars on the seafloor outside my window were honking their horns, and cheering people were waving flags. Bootishly, I reflected that

Castro was in and I was there — in the gutter

Havana seemed even jollier than Glasgow at New Year. My breakfast arrived by an unseen hand while I was in the shower. Then I descended the stairs and summoned a taxi to visit the Express's stringer. My driver, too, was in ebullient mood. But not for long. As we weaved through the revelers, he suddenly slammed on the

brakes, flung open the door, rolled into the gutter, and yelled at me to follow him. Lying beside him in the gutter, I heard him explain above the hubbub that Cuba's hated dictator Fulgencio Batista had fled in the night, and that we had driven into the first shooting of the revolution. He then drew my attention to the little holes which were appearing in the boot above our heads.

It was, I confess, a glorious moment for an aspiring foreign correspondent, and my first experience of the idiotic sense of invulnerability most reporters feel in such circumstances. It was only later when I encountered my only rival on the story, a Daily Mail man, also from New York, that I realised the similarity to Scoop. He too was in Havana by mistake, having been sent on the same drift story — about a balloon as it happens — as the one that had taken me to the Orinoco. But unlike me, he had celebrated Hogmanay. As a result, he had

been woken up by his bedside telephone, to find an unknown woman lying beside him.

On the phone was the Mail's foreign desk telling him to dump the balloon and cover the revolution. Proudly he boasted that his desk man never discovered that he hadn't known anything about the revolution — not even when the woman woke up in mid-phone call and started complaining.

We two had the first few days of the Castro story entirely to ourselves, since the airport closed and the phone lines stayed open. It was a foreign correspondent's dream, including a piece of pure Hollywood when a waiter brought me a white telephone on a silver salver so that I could take a congratulatory call from London while standing chest-deep in the hotel pool. But the final touch was pure Scoop.

There had been no battle at Santa Clara, just a small skirmish. Not many dead.

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FinanceGuardian

Burger King and McDonald's continue expansion with 100 new outlets each

The big bite... burger giants are continuing to cash in on the fast food craze now worth over a third of the £24 billion eating-out market in the UK

8,500 fast food jobs boom

Lisa Buckingham
BRITAIN'S growing passion for fast food will create more than 8,500 jobs this year as Burger King and McDonald's expand their estate chains.

Burger King said yesterday it intends to open another 100 outlets during 1999, taking its number of restaurants to 623. McDonald's - the UK's largest restaurant business - will open the same number, creating 5,000 jobs, and will end the year with 1,022 burger bars.

Both companies, along with smaller players such as Whitbread's Beefeater chain, are attempting to grab a larger slice of the British eating-out market which is this year estimated to be worth £24 billion - of which about £9.5 billion is accounted for by the 2.5 billion fast food meals sold.

The market is forecast to expand to £33 billion by 2004, just 30 years after McDonald's sold its first beef patty at 18p a time, in Woolwich, South-east London.

The jobs announcements follow the revelation earlier this week that the JD Wetherspoon intends to create about 2,000 jobs in its pub chain which will be expanded by 80 units in the coming year. McDonald's reckons 500 of the 5,000 jobs it is adding will be full time management positions.

The rest will be part-time, many of which will be filled by students. Burger King was unable to say what proportion of its 3,500 new jobs would be full time. At present Burger King employs about 18,300 people in its UK restaurants. Trained staff in the provinces earn £3.38 an hour while those in London pick up £3.65 an hour equivalent to £127.75 for a standard working week.

For both Burger King and McDonald's, the UK market remains a small part of their operations. Burger King now has about 9,900 restaurants worldwide while McDonald's - which opens 2,000 a year - has more than 23,000.

But neither company has any plans to decrease the pace of openings after the millennium, even though there had been some indication that the appetite for McDonald's has been slowing in its US heart-



Uncertainty over Diageo stake as Arnault quits

Lisa Buckingham
BERNARD Arnault, the Frenchman who threatened to scupper the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan, resigned yesterday as a director of the giant drinks group Diageo, created despite his opposition.

But Mr Arnault's resignation created uncertainty about the 11 per cent of Diageo shares controlled by his luxury goods and fashion interests, LVMH, and Christian Dior. LVMH is currently bidding about 5 billion francs (£538 million) for the beauty products owned by Sanofi and the sale of all or part of the Diageo stake, currently valued at £2.5 billion, would prevent any strain on the balance sheet.

Diageo - whose other interests include Burger King and Pillsbury - said it had no idea what Mr Arnault would do with the shares, although his resignation statement said he "fully supported" the drinks company's strategy for increasing shareholder value.

LVMH recently denied any immediate intention to sell the shares. About half of the holding was built up during 1997, when Mr Arnault - whose LVMH drinks interests had long-standing distribution agreements with Guinness - attempted unsuccessfully to derail the £24 billion merger of Britain's two biggest drinks companies.

The British company denied there was any remaining animosity between Mr Arnault and the other directors. Diageo's chairman, Tony Greener, said long-term trading arrangements between Diageo's spirits and wine divi-

Peerage goes to man who put Ford on global highway

Nicholas Bannister, Chief Business Correspondent
MOTOR and newspaper industry executives dominate the business representatives in the New Year's Honours list.

Sir Alex Trotman, who has just retired as chairman and chief executive of Ford, the second-largest US carmaker, has been made a life peer.

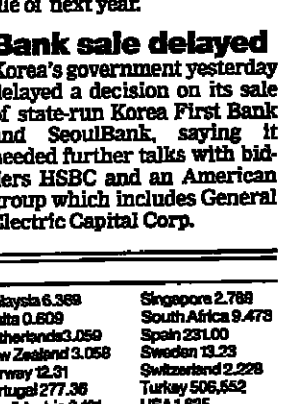
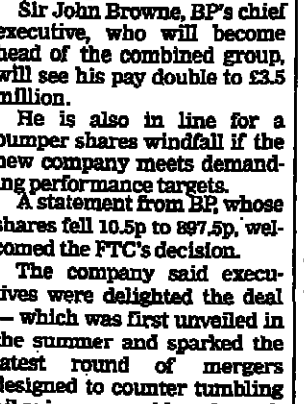
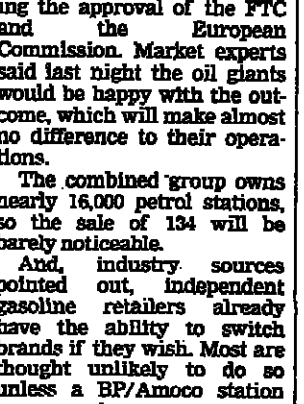
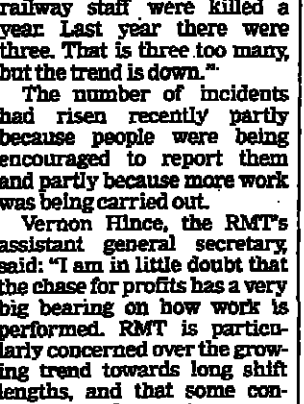
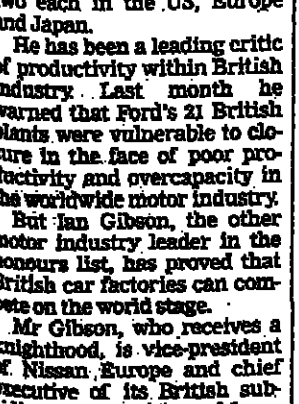
After joining Ford of Britain as a trainee in 1955, Sir Alex rose through the ranks, ultimately taking control of the American parent company in 1993.

Sir Alex, the first Briton to head the US group, is widely credited with having turned Ford into a truly global company. He recently forecast that within 10 years the world's motor industry will be dominated by six manufacturers, two each in the US, Europe and Japan.

He has been a leading critic of productivity within British industry. Last month he warned that Ford's 21 British plants were vulnerable to closure in the face of poor productivity and overcapacity in the worldwide motor industry.

But Sir Alex, the other motor industry leader in the honours list, has proved that British car factories can compete on the world stage.

Mr Gibson, who receives a knighthood, is vice-president of Nissan Europe and chief executive of its British subsidiary, Nissan Motor Manufacturing. Earlier this year Nissan's Sunderland plant



Driving forces... Ian Gibson, left, and Alex Trotman

Union blames contractors for rail safety problems

Nicholas Bannister, Chief Business Correspondent
SAFETY standards laid down by Railtrack are being flouted by contractors, according to the main rail union.

BP's £30 billion takeover of Amoco approved

Lisa Buckingham
BRITISH Petroleum's £30 billion takeover of Amoco was yesterday given the go-ahead by American regulators, with only the lightest of strings attached.

The Federal Trade Commission in Washington said it would approve the acquisition, which will create Britain's biggest company with more than 100,000 employees, so long as the merged companies sell off 134 petrol stations and allow about 1,600 independent petrol retailers to switch brands if they want.

Both BP and Amoco had been bracing themselves for disposals in return for securing the approval of the FTC and the European Commission. Market experts said last night the oil giants would be happy with the outcome, which will make almost no difference to their operations.

The combined group owns nearly 16,000 petrol stations, so the sale of 134 will be barely noticeable. And industry sources pointed out, independent gasoline retailers already have the ability to switch brands if they wish. Most are thought unlikely to do so unless a BP/Amoco station opens nearby.

News in brief

Mobiles keep their numbers

Mobile phone users who switch networks will be able to keep their number in the new year in a move expected to intensify competition in the mobile phone market.

House price rise

UK house prices will rise by 4 per cent in 1999, faster than inflation, but slower than the 5 to 6 per cent of 1998 owing to the faltering economy, according to a Halifax survey. It also predicts that UK base rates will fall from 6.25 per cent to about 5.5 per cent by the middle of next year.

Bank sale delayed

Korea's government yesterday delayed a decision on its sale of state-run Korea First Bank and SeoulBank, saying it needed further talks with bidders HSBC and an American group which includes General Electric Capital Corp.

Tourist rates - BANK SETS

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Australia 2.842 | Germany 2.729 | Malaysia 6.389 | Singapore 2.788 |
| Austria 13.058 | Greece 457.88 | South Africa 9.478 | |
| Belgium 35.31 | Hong Kong 12.58 | Spain 231.00 | |
| Canada 2.531 | India 17.575 | Sweden 13.23 | |
| Cyprus 0.802 | Indonesia 1.081 | Switzerland 2.228 | |
| Denmark 92.40 | Israel 7.00 | Taiwan 277.28 | |
| Finland 6.284 | Italy 2.704 | Turkey 506.62 | |
| France 6.111 | | USA 1.055 | |

Supplied by Reuters including rates, shares and other

The single currency



Birth of the euro

The dilemma of inflation versus unemployment is forcing the men in grey suits to learn political skills, write **Michael White** and **Larry Elliott**

Banking has never been so exciting



On tick ... the countdown to euro launch and a radically different role for central bankers is well under way

PHOTOGRAPH: SARI GUSTAFSSON

IF YOU make no other new year resolution, promise to remember the name Wim Duisenberg. As president of the European Central Bank, the Dutch official will be managing the euro when banks in the 11 Eurozone states reopen on Monday.

Big jobs don't come much duller or more important than central banking. As of January 4, the European job will be one of the biggest, up there with the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of Japan.

More than that, Mr Duisenberg's job has suddenly been made far from dull by an accidental configuration of events: not just imminent arrival of the euro but Germany's spring to the left in its September elections and the global economic downturn.

It was neatly summed up in a recent remark by Oskar Lafontaine, new Euro-hate figure of the British tabloids. As finance minister in Bonn's new SPD-Green coalition he is its ideological Gordon Brown to Gerhard Schröder's pragmatic Tony Blair.

"I don't want to put anyone at the European Central Bank under pressure," Mr Lafontaine observed pointedly. "The only people under pressure are those without a job." The struggle for control of Europe's economy in the euro era is being fought between central bankers determined to

keep the lid on inflation and politicians eager to see progress in the fight for more jobs. Fleet Street's tabloids joined in, enraged by talk of tax harmonisation (mainly from mischievous Mr Lafontaine) ahead of this month's EU summit in Vienna.

Round one has gone to the politicians. Just before Vienna, 10 of the 11 (Italy excepted) agreed to cut their interest rates to 3 per cent to boost consumer and business confidence. In an FT interview Mr Duisenberg called the move "rather sensational", admitted the competitive dangers of an over-valued euro and hinted at more rate cuts to come.

For Mr Duisenberg to give media interviews at all was a sign of changing times. Belatedly the EU's central bankers are realising that they risk being blamed for the faltering economic recovery. Against all instincts they must woo public opinion.

The arrival of the euro was bound to create litters. But much of the recent brouhaha rides on the back of one document, the New European Way, recently signed in Brussels by Gordon Brown and his 10 fellow centre-left EU finance ministers. In it they committed themselves to Blairish macroeconomic policies (stability, fiscal discipline and the rest), but with a neo-

Keynesian twist: the drive for growth and employment.

The document contains a passing reference to the need for member states to avoid "harmful tax competition". What that means exactly depends on who you talk to. Unfair subsidies to Dublin docks, say British officials. Low corporation tax in Britain (and Ireland), suggest some German counterparts.

Vienna failed to resolve ambiguities and rival ambitions. Mr Lafontaine told party workers in Bonn his British friends had asked him to say "co-ordination" instead of "harmonisation". The German minister may have Euro-logic on his side. Gordon Brown has a national veto. Knowing the issue to be politically sensitive, the 11 agreed to kick deep into the long grass a planned paper on tax. Messrs Brown and Lafontaine agree they have an obligation to Europe's 17 million unemployed. So does Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Lionel Jospin's finance minister.

This is not the way it was meant to be, of course. When Europe's great and good gathered in the Dutch town of Maastricht in December 1991, the idea was that the new ECB should be a technocratic, rather than political, institution. Falling debt rates, low inflation and interest rate levels were the qualifications for

membership of the euro club, not shrinking role queues.

In this high-minded world it would be the ECB's duty to achieve price stability; nothing more important than that.

The fact is that politics and economics have moved on since the blueprint for economic and monetary union emerged in the late 1960s. Then, it was seen as crucial that the Germans should give up their beloved Bundesbank (and D-mark) in favour of a body that would set interest rates on a Europe-wide basis. That meant making the ECB look just like the Bundesbank, only tougher.

But this is 1998, not 1988. The structure of the ECB now looks ill-equipped to deal with Europe's problems. Certainly, that is how it looks to the new

breed of centre-left and left politicians. Signatories to the New European Way are pressing for the central bank to be less obsessed with price stability and more concerned about Europe's jobs.

Thus, the New European Way notes that "... budgetary, monetary, social, income and environmental policies have to be seen together in dialogue". It talks of "a social contract for solidarity, equal opportunity and justice". It praises macroeconomic stability as a means to such ends. Yet dialogue and justice are not words writ large in the articles of the Maastricht treaty which set up the ECB. One of the most comprehensive statements of the new thinking came from Mr Strauss-Kahn in London recently: "Being committed to price stability does not imply that central banks should narrowly focus on prices, especially when inflation is low and falling."

Yet, it has been in Bonn, not Paris, that the real shift in attitudes has been seen over the past couple of months. Helmut Kohl sold the ECB as a bastion of strength, knowing that this was the only way to convince a sceptical German public that EMU would work.

However, the political strains were already starting to show before Mr Schröder's election victory. Last spring, France tried to block

Germany's choice for ECB president — Mr Duisenberg — and impose its man, Jean-Claude Trichet. The play appeared to work: Mr Duisenberg was forced to agree to stand down part way through his eight-year term and be replaced by the Frenchman.

The price of that trauma may be high. There are signs that Mr Duisenberg, never a deft political operator, will dig his heels in to prove he is independent of the politicians. But the lesson of the French success has not been lost on Messrs Schröder and Lafontaine.

In economic terms, what the new German administration says makes sense. Despite all the talk about Europe's sclerotic labour markets, true enough, the main reason why the Continent has such high levels of unemployment is that it has been operating deflationary monetary policies for the past two decades. Lower growth has contributed to larger budget deficits.

What is more, even with the move to a joint 3 per cent rate, the ECB looks out of step with the rest of the world. Interest rates have been coming down

in the United States and Britain, where the authorities have responded to the G7 call for cheaper borrowing. The ECB has behaved just like the Bundesbank when faced with political pressure: show off!

Herein lies the risk for the European economy. There are three possible outcomes.

● The ECB caves in to renewed pressure, rates come down further and prospects of the euro's launch being marred by a sharp slowdown in growth are diminished.

● Mr Duisenberg and his chums win brownie points from the markets by facing down the politicians and cutting borrowing costs in their own time.

● An unresolved struggle. The politicians become frustrated at the conservatism of the central bank and increase spending to compensate. The central bank retaliates by tightening monetary policy, pushing up the value of the euro and choking off Europe's strongest engine of growth — exports.

The ECB will fulfil its mandate and deliver low inflation. But it will be a Pyrrhic victory if Europe's debt queues start to lengthen again.

Watching over the euro

European Central Bank

- Based in Frankfurt
- President: Wim Duisenberg, former head of the Dutch central bank
- Sets interest rate for the 11 countries in the single currency zone
- Goal: to keep inflation in the euro-zone below 2 per cent
- Structure: 17-member governing council consisting of 6-person executive board and 11 central bank heads from member countries
- Meetings: Governing council meets every second Thursday

Home loan rates could fall to 5pc

Rupert Jones on the prospect of cheaper mortgages

BRITAIN has yet to make a decision on joining the single currency but homeowners are already benefiting from the expectation that we will sign up at some point in the future.

Mortgage customers have enjoyed three interest rate cuts since the start of October, with further reductions likely next year. The financial revolution about to occur on the Continent is clearly putting extra downward pressure on British rates.

Borrowers can hopefully look forward to even lower mortgage costs as UK interest rates drop further to converge with those of mainland Europe ahead of our possible

entry into Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

On January 1, 11 countries will adopt the euro as their national currency. They include France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The interest rate for the euro-zone countries is 3 per cent.

Some analysts have predicted that base rates (currently 6.25 per cent) could fall to less than 5 per cent next year and as low as 3 per cent by 2000 if the Government signals its intention to join the single currency. If Britain does go in, some experts believe that by 2002 it could be looking at a standard variable mortgage rate of between 4 and 5 per cent.

That could mean someone with a £50,000 repayment home loan paying up to £127 a month less than they are now.

But Martin Ellis, economist at the Halifax, says nothing should be taken for granted. There are no guarantees that British base rates will fall as far as some have suggested, or that the Eurozone rate will remain at 3 per cent.

While interest rates in the euro zone are likely to be significantly lower than in the UK, experts are warning people to tread carefully. There is no guarantee that sterling will be locked at any particular rate against the euro and if sterling were to drop sharply, borrowers could land themselves with a much larger capital debt to repay.

Abbey National and Barclays have both confirmed they will be launching variable-rate euro mortgages for those with an income in euros early in the New Year.

Why I love the euro John Monks



THE coming 12 months will be the year of the euro, and in consequence 1999 could well prove a painful period for Britain.

Tomorrow 11 countries will gain real economic advantage from the launch of the euro. Euroland will rapidly become as important a player in world economics as the United States. Its member countries will gain all the benefits of a large trade area and will become an attractive destination for inward investors.

In contrast, Britain will be excluded from key economic decisions. It is beginning to look as if we have repeated the standard British error of coming too late to Europe.

The Bank of England has made welcome cuts to interest rates in recent months — but

there is still a real contrast with Euroland, where interest rates are now 3 per cent. This would not just be good news for jobs and investment, but would mean substantially lower mortgages.

Not all the arguments go in favour of the euro, but some of the arguments against now look much weaker than they once did. There was a substantial body of opinion that said the euro would never get going at all. Then there are those who say that the convergence criteria are too tough. I have some sympathy with this view and it is clear there has been a bias towards deflation in many European countries in the run-up to the launch of the euro.

On the other hand, it is hard to argue that Britain has

had a succession of Chancellors championing the bit to increase borrowing and spending but only held back by Maastricht.

More serious are concerns about the exchange rate. The biggest problem facing Britain has been an over-valued currency. When we finally grasp the nettle and decide whether we want to join the euro, the most important question will be at what rate.

But opposing the euro to advocate a lower pound has not been a credible strategy. It is Britain's exclusion from the euro that has helped currency markets see it as a suitable destination for hot money and the result has been to push the pound higher. Staying out has only costs jobs. — John Monks is general secretary of the TUC

Why I hate the euro Ruth Lea



ECONOMIC and Monetary Union is almost here — a hugely risky economic and political undertaking for 11 of the EU's member states.

One reason it is so risky is because economic unions usually do not survive without political union. Another is because the 11 countries still show considerable economic heterogeneity: the Maastricht convergence criteria were but a smokescreen for true economic convergence.

And as the non-democratic, vestigially accountable, European Central Bank takes the reins of choosing the "one size fits all" short-term interest rate for Euroland, countries (for ex-

ample, Ireland) which need different interest rates will have to cope as best they can with the potential economic instability.

I am relieved that the UK will not be a first-wave member, although there are benefits, including the end of transaction costs and exchange rate volatility with Euroland's economics, which account for only about a half of our trade in goods and services.

But these messy benefits are outweighed by the economic costs of entering EMU before the British and the core European economies have properly converged. Our business cycle needs to move into "sync" with Euroland's and fundamental structural dif-

ferences need to disappear. I see no moves towards such convergence. Without it we are likely to require different interest rates from the ECB's and damaging "booms and busts" would probably be the result. If interest rates were too low — then an inflationary boom is likely; too high, then we are likely to have a re-run of our experience in the ERM when we had to follow high German interest rates.

Our suffering was ended when the pound was expelled from the ERM, we dropped our rates below Germany's and the economy recovered. EMU? No thank you — for the "foreseeable future". Ruth Lea is head of policy

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| Geneva | SF | 218 | 382 | 703 |
| Zurich | SF | 218 | 382 | 703 |
| Brussels | B.F. | 4,370 | 7,940 | 14,060 |
| Amsterdam | FLG | 265 | 465 | 855 |
| Madrid | PTA | 15,800 | 27,300 | 50,200 |
| Stockholm | SKR | 1,060 | 1,860 | 3,415 |
| Copenhagen | DKR | 1,060 | 1,860 | 3,415 |

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Racing

Belle win could ring the changes on tongue-straps

Ron Cox

BRANCEPETH Belle, a runner in the final Selling Handicap hurdle at Catterick today, is not normally the type of horse to make the headlines. But her victory in a claiming race at Market Rasen on Boxing Day could help bring about an important rule change which will benefit punters everywhere.

She was one of three winners at the weekend — the highest profile one being Catterick Chase scorer Cumbrin Challenge — whose improved form was due to her being equipped with a tongue-strap for the first time.

Horses with breathing difficulties can be transformed by having their tongue tied down, but at present this crucial piece of information is denied to the vast majority of the betting public.

Trainers need only declare tongue-strap 45 minutes before a race, but moves are afoot to make their overnight declaration compulsory, in the same way as blinkers and visors. Patrick Hibbert-Foy,

the senior stewards' secretary, raised the issue with Jockey Club director of regulation Malcolm Wallace yesterday and was pleased with his response.

"Malcolm Wallace supports my view that the public have a right to be informed," said Hibbert-Foy. "The Jockey Club are to look at the situation again, although I am not sure when. A lot of people are involved in a proposed rule change such as this, including the National Trainers' Federation."

No doubt trainers, traditionally slow to accept change, will voice their objections but Hibbert-Foy is confident that any minor problems can be overcome.

Let us hope he succeeds. Trainers face a hard enough time, and their confidence can only be eroded by the sort of inconsistencies in form which saw Cumbrin Challenge trail in a well-beaten fourth on Saturday and then beat Direct Route 45 hours later.

As the dust began to settle on Adrian Maguire's decision to end his retainer with David Nicholson, Colin Smith, the

owner of the Jackdaws Castle yard, gave a vote of confidence to both jockey and trainer.

"Nothing will change at Jackdaws Castle in real terms," he said, "except that Adrian will have a little more flexibility than he has now. And I think he will come out of this better off, as I believe he will ride a big percentage of the horses at the yard under the new terms."

"Richard Johnson fits in like he always has done. But there will be no retained jockey here for the rest of this season, and quite possibly next season."

"There is definitely no person on the shortlist to replace David Nicholson," he added. "I am happy with David but if you say to me 'When does David retire?' — that is another question and I don't know."

Nicholson, who commented he was sorry to hear about Adrian ending his retainer, is still more than welcome at Jackdaws.

Yesterday nominated the Pillar Chase at Cheltenham on January 30 as the next port of call for Escartefigue.

He ran a very good race at Kempton and I was very pleased with him," he said.

Escartefigue could cross swords there again with Teeton Mill, who beat him six lengths in the King George, but the grey's trainer Venetia Williams also has another race in mind.

"There's a strong possibility that his next outing will be the Peter Marsh Chase at Haydock," said Williams after sending out Boots Madden to record an easy win at Stratford yesterday.

Ayr's meeting scheduled for Saturday is subject to a 2.30pm inspection today. Parts of the course are waterlogged.

Gale can come storming back

WIDELY available at 9-1, Around The Gale (3.20) looks the bet in today's Showers Handicap at Warwick. In anything like his old form he would make short work of this opposition, writes Ron Cox.

David Gandolfo's seven-year-old endured a series of physical problems last season, but the trainer feels he has Around The Gale to his liking again.

He certainly has a well-handicapped horse to go to war with — Around The

Gale begins the season 20lb lower in the ratings than last term, when he started third favourite for the First National Bank Gold Cup at Ascot on his debut.

Around The Gale was a smart novice two seasons ago, winning first time out and subsequently finishing two lengths second to Land Afar in a Grade 2 chase at Kempton, and if he can reproduce a semblance of that form he should be able to account for some thoroughly exposed rivals.

Fontwell card

| RON COX | TOP FORM |
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| 1.10 Fontwell 1.40 Muller 2.10 Muller 2.40 Muller 3.10 Muller | Quintet Muller Quintet Muller Muller Muller |

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Out on his own... Goodtime George is clear at the last at Stratford

SPORTS NEWS 13

Sport in brief

Abuse investigation into Australian tennis

AN investigation has been promised into claims that female tennis scholarship holders at the Australian Sports Institute (ASI) have been subjected to starvation diets and verbal abuse. John Bontee, the ASI director, says he will examine allegations from at least 34 women that their careers were ruined by the training regime enforced at the institute. Some said they developed eating disorders because of the pressure to lose weight. "It's all too easy to blame the ASI when someone is not successful," countered Bontee. "Sometimes the athletes should perhaps look at themselves a bit more closely."

The French tennis federation is to dispense with the advantage rule in eight satellite tournaments over the next two months in an attempt to make the game more attractive to television. Starting at the Grasse tournament which begins on Monday, the first player to win a point takes the game after the score has reached deuce.

Harris bombs back

ISTYNN HARRIS, who missed Great Britain's last rugby league Test against New Zealand in November with a groin injury, has been passed fit to play for Leeds in their New Year's Day Telety Challenge match against Castleford at Headingley. The return of Harris at full-back is one of seven changes to the side that beat Halifax 12-6 on Boxing Day as the Rhinos welcome back Brad Godden and Marc Glanville as well as the Australian Test winger Wendell Sailor, who will play his second match for the club before resuming his spell with the union team as Tykes. Castleford include their new Australian centre Michael Eager and have the former Salford winger Darren Rogers on the bench.

Foreman still seeking Holmes

CONFOUNDING a newspaper report that his so-called "Battle of the Aged" with his fellow former heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman in the Houston Astrodon on January 23 was about to be aborted because of lack of funds, Larry Holmes was adamant yesterday that the fight would proceed. A report in the New York Daily News said the promoter Roger Levitt would still be unable to provide the agreed purse of \$4 million (\$2.9 million) despite being granted a one-week extension to last week's deadline. "It's 100 per cent on," maintained Levitt. "There is nothing happening to make this fight not happen." With pay-per-view sales apparently hit by the return to action of Mike Tyson the previous weekend, the event is expected to be cancelled today.

Midnight Rambler storms it

THE storm-hit Sydney-Hobart Race, which claimed six lives, was won by one of the smallest boats in the race, the 35-foot AFR Midnight Rambler, owned by Ed Psaltis. It is the first time for 11 years that the race has been won by a boat less than 40 feet overall, writes Bob Fisher. AFR Midnight Rambler was the 10th boat to finish, ahead of many larger yachts, and was easily the quickest on DMS corrected time.

Psaltis, who has sailed 15 previous Sydney-Hobart races, said: "In the end our strategy was a matter of survival as well as good race tactics." He added: "Unlike the others, we hit the worst when it was still daylight so we could see the waves coming. I remembered reading (about the 1979 Fastnet disaster) that the only way to take on waves that size was at a 60-70 degree angle rather than pulling away and risking being swamped and rolled by the waves."

In second place overall on corrected time was the 1996 winner Ausmaid, a Farr-designed 47-footer owned by Kevin Pearce, with Syd Fischer's Farr 50, Ragamuffin, third.

Catterick runners and riders

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Warwick Jackpot card with guide to the form

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Rugby Union

English clubs set for Euro return

£10m bait for Allied Dunbar clubs to rejoin foreign battle. Paul Rees reports

THE boycott of the European Cup by England's leading clubs is set to end at a time when the civil war which has engulfed the professional game in Britain appears to be blowing itself out. Bath won the European Cup last January but could not defend it because English First Division Rugby decided to take no further part in the tournament, or the low-profile European Shield, as long as the tournaments were run by European Rugby Cup Ltd, seen as a Celtic cabal.

The English failed to persuade the French to join the boycott so the two competitions will take place this season, but ERC accepts that the European Cup will have a prosperous future only if the Allied Dunbar clubs return.

The tournament has not been sponsored since 1995 after ERC fell out with Heineken but it has signed a deal with ISL, the management and marketing company, which guarantees it £10 million over the next three years. With the English clubs back in the fold, ISL reckons the sponsorship and marketing package would be worth at least three times that amount.

With virtually all the leading clubs in England and Wales heading for another financial loss this year, many players are expected to be out of work this summer when their contracts expire. Europe needs the English clubs, and the clubs need Europe.

"I expect our clubs to be back in Europe," said Brian Balster, chairman of the Rugby Football Union's management group. "We are very close to agreeing a cross-border tournament which would start next season... Unions and clubs both now have to occupy the middle ground. The same demands that we do."

The RFU withdrew from the working party set up by the four home unions to create a British league in protest at a £80,000 fine levied by the International Rugby Board for not taking sanctions against the Allied Dunbar One Clubs who have this season been playing friendlies against the Welsh rebels Cardiff and Swansea.

But Balster has maintained

contact with the working party's chairman Glenmor Griffiths and plans have been made for a two-division league involving at least 24 sides; the Irish have withdrawn and the Scots in February begin a review of their game which could see the end of their two new clubs, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

That would make the cross-border tournament an Anglo-Welsh league. Cardiff and Swansea, who were both fined £150,000 by the Welsh RU this month for breaking regulations after seceding, would be part of it and the league would effectively legitimise what has been happening this season.

Balster said it would "ensure our leading clubs are given the means to finance themselves through the tournaments they play in. With England back in Europe, the economic potential of our clubs will grow significantly."

An obstacle, according to EFR and Cardiff and Swansea, has been Vernon Pugh, the IRB chairman and a member of the WRU, and a leading figure in ERC.

Pugh said last night that he was determined to end the impasse. "ERC has made a number of changes in line with what the English clubs asked for: the better a country does in Europe, the greater say it will have in the boardroom and it will have more money."

"By brokering the deal with ISL, which we believe is an exceptional one, we have created the means for the English clubs to substantially increase their income. The IRB has been portrayed in recent weeks as a dinosaur but we have shown up the matrix for the club game in Europe which is not a million miles from where the British league working party is."

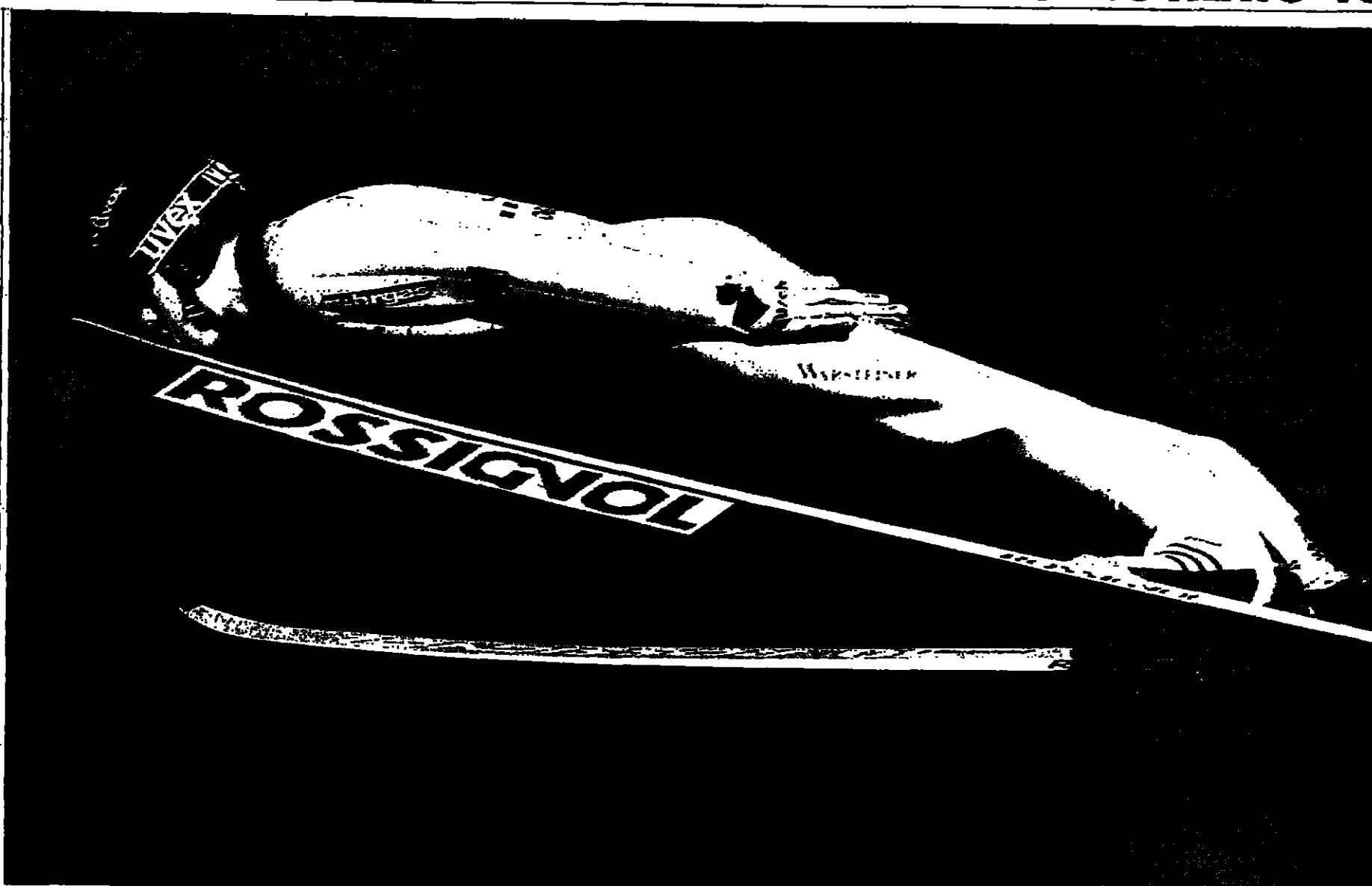
"I have long been in favour of an Anglo-Welsh league. Four years ago I thought I had reached an agreement with the RFU. What everyone now knows is that the European Cup has huge commercial pulling power. It has survived without the English; it will thrive with them. All the IRB wants is for the game in Europe to get its act together. Clubs do not go on losing huge amounts of money."

Jones outflanked by Achilles

KINGSLY JONES, who led Wales against South Africa last summer, yesterday accepted that his prospects of a berth in Graham Henry's World Cup squad may have been snuffed by the ruptured Achilles tendon which may sideline him for four months.

The Gloucester flanker, who had an operation after last Sunday's game against Wasps, said he was "gutted", calling it the worst injury of his career. "I think that by summer Graham Henry will have his squad set," he said.

Another back-row candidate, Swansea's Paul Moriarty, may miss the rest of the season because of a groin complaint. He is under doctor's orders to take a complete rest from the game for a month and may well need an operation. Swansea, meanwhile, have answered an SOS from Bob Dwyer, the Bristol coach, beset by injuries to his front row. Dwyer has taken the prop John Evans on a month's loan.



Chin and tonic... the home favourite Martin Schmitt keeps his balance to win yesterday's International Four Hills ski-jumping event in Oberstdorf, Germany. PHOTOGRAPH: LUIE LEM

Cricket

Gough's cry for the future

David Hopps says Australians are wrong. The bowler's victory bellow demanded respect for change rather than pity for the past

AS ENGLAND barely dared yesterday to contemplate an Ashes series that, against all predictions, was still alive. One image dominated the mind. Darren Gough's bellow of exultation, a stump torn from the ground and clenched above his head, was about more than the winning of a single Test match; it represented a protest about a faded reputation.

In England the nation's cricketers remain targets for condescension, a complacent satirical vehicle that represents every festive season as much as Christmas. As cuttings from a Morecambe and Wise Christmas show.

Forget that the summer's series victory against South Africa was the reward for an increasingly disciplined approach; no, no, no, they are still planning parties for the arrival of the 20th century. Small truths, writ large, made into lies.

Australia's derision, though, has been more wounding. Gutless, spineless, rainforest series by which England's body had been forcibly removed over the past few weeks that they began to sound like a walking wishbone. When Alec Stewart spoke ambitiously of levelling the last two Tests, no one imagined that he might be holding the longer piece.



Bubbling over... Gough and Headley yesterday. CLIVE MASON

Well, perhaps he is. When Gough stood upright in the evening shadows and roared his defiance, with the bucolic anger of a medieval warlord, he pronounced that the ridicule had gone on long enough. It is safe to assume that he pronounced it fairly crudely but it seemed entirely apt that he did. In the solidarity of their victory, England emphasised that they care.

England still possess the same faults — all the best spinners are employed at Millbank and their slip catching has been lamentable — but they enter the Sydney Test with a right to self-respect. No one who witnessed that awesome final session, the longest in Test history, could suggest otherwise.

punch is one thing, producing the follow-up blows to level the series quite another.

But what a lark that would be. Only a week ago the New Year Test had threatened to be an occasion to bear stoically, the final confirmation of Australian supremacy, the looming possibility of a 4-0 margin that might set England's tentative improvement back years. Now Sydney offers the delicious, if outside, prospect that Australian presumption might be pricked.

"How's that for a miracle? England win a cricket Test" was the headline in the Sydney Morning Herald yesterday. The ridicule still sticks.

But for once baiting England seemed less like a game of pinning the tail on the donkey than trying to saddle a bucking bronco. And, when they do achieve better times, one senses strangely that the Australian nation might be much the quicker to give them credit.

Gough's stamping and snorting was widely referred to in Australia yesterday as his "primal scream". It was nothing of the sort. It was a cry from the past, it was an insistence upon a future. It might have been the moment when even English cricket demanded that it had a role to play in the next millennium.

David Lloyd yesterday underlined his decision not to step down as the England coach. "My contract is until 1999 and I don't think I'm in a position to say I'm going to retire early or I want to carry on," he said. "Somebody else will take that and that's the way that we've worked, but it is not my intention to step down."

New Zealand attacks Ashes series

Rob Steen

AS ALEC STEWART and his rejuvenated troops thank heavens for the five-match rubber, there is a distinct possibility that Saturday's showdown in Sydney will be the final opportunity any team will have to square a Test series after going two down. Should one revolutionary proposal for a World Test Championship find favour at next week's International Cricket Council summit in Christchurch, future series will all be conducted over three games.

The threat emanates from the antipodes but not from the expected quarter. While England were being pounded in Perth and added in Adelaide, many a stout Australian could be heard chuntering on about the poms being unworthy of five Tests. However, the idea emanates from New Zealand where, in common with most members of the five-day fraternity, battles of that length have never been economically viable.

"The main aim is to give context to Test cricket," said Chris Dool, chief executive of New Zealand Cricket, who be-moaned the fact that the likes of Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and his own land seldom see "the brand teams".

The Kiwi blueprint is one of four to be tabled in addition to one from the ICC chairman Jagmohan Dalmiya, who advocates a World Cup-style championship spread over two months. Although Dool

maintains that "the traditional series are essential", he points out that seven of the nine full ICC members support a rotating programme whereby each country plays the other eight in two series, home and away, over a four- or five-year span. Accommodating the longer format would be a logistical nightmare.

English coffers would be the most sorely hit. Already linked in are money-spinning six-Test rubbers at home to West Indies in 2000 and Australia in 2001 as well as next winter's five-chapter series in South Africa. Full Montys in the Caribbean and Australia also form part of an existing four-year rota, one that has thus far precluded a series against Sri Lanka or a Lord's date for Zimbabwe. The only ongoing five-Test debate not involving England is the Australia-West Indies duel for the Worrell Trophy.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the New Zealand concept would oblige each country to play four series a year, leaving scant room to manoeuvre, and less than Bangladesh gain promotion.

Then again, now that the first-class counties have consented to staging seven Tests a summer, there is one obvious compromise that could mollify all. Stage nine or 10 and England and Australia could run the Ashes in conjunction with the championship, restricting points to the first three Tests but retaining the dramatics unique to the extended dispute.

New Zealand v India: second Test

Azharuddin rues misses as McMillan and Cairns seal win

CRAIG McMILLAN and Chris Cairns shared a sixth-wicket stand of 137 to guide New Zealand to victory over India in the second Test in Wellington yesterday.

The Kiwis resumed the final day struggling on 73 for four chasing 213 and suffered an early blow when the nightwatchman Paul Wiseman was trapped lbw by Javagal Srinath with the fourth ball of the morning.

But McMillan and the all-rounder Cairns steadied the ship to put their side 1-0 up in the three-Test series, the first having been abandoned as a draw because of rain.

Cairns was dismissed for 61 only two runs shy of the victory target and Dion Nash hit the winning boundary as McMillan finished unbeaten on 74, New Zealand wrapping up a four-wicket win on 216 for six.

Cairns was relieved to contribute after failing to take a wicket in either innings and scoring a second-half duck in New Zealand's first innings.

"I was actually genuinely nervous last night for the first time in a long while and in the end it was good to have to play with some real pressure on and play a bit tighter than normal," he said.

Stephen Fleming said his 39th Test as a player and his 14th as New Zealand's captain

had been the most exhausting of his career. "It is the most mentally demanding Test match I've been involved in. It was stressful all the way through and you would go home every night mentally knackered," he said.

Both captains agreed that New Zealand's superior fielding had been decisive. Mohammed Azharuddin said a series of dropped catches cost his side the match and he called for a radical improvement before the final Test, which starts in Hamilton on Saturday.

● Pakistan and India will meet at Test level for the first time in 10 years in Delhi next month. They will play two Tests and will be joined by Sri Lanka for the inaugural Asian Test Championship.

INDIA: First innings 208 (M Azharuddin 103, Dool 7-65).
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 352 (M J Ash 56, D J Nash 89, D J Vettori 57, Cummins 4-55).
INDIA: Second innings 356 (S R Tendulkar 115).

NEW ZEALAND: Second innings (overnight 73-4).
● Ash 56, D J Nash 89, D J Vettori 57, Cummins 4-55.
● P J Wiseman lbw b Srinath 0.
● C L Cairns c Joseph b Srinath 61.
● D J Nash not out 4.
● S R Tendulkar not out 115.

Total first day 216.
● Fall of wickets: NZ 74-211.
● Bowling: Srinath 10-2-1-62-3, Prasad 10-3-36-0, Kumbla 25-8-70-2, Harbhajan Singh 1-11-5, Tendulkar 3-0-0-0.
● New Zealand won by four wickets.

1998 — the defining moments

Shot that warned golfing world

David Davies on Sergio Garcia's Amateur Championship triumph and the prodigy's professional debut at the Spanish Open next year

ABRUTALLY cold easterly wind, biting in off the North Sea, made the short 4th at Muirfield desperately difficult. The hole, 182 yards long, has an elevated green and the tee shot has to be placed precisely, or risk running off into bunkers so deep that the older members need a winch to get out.

Sergio Garcia, hands already numb, stood on the tee and wondered how he could hit that green, which was important because this was the second qualifying round for the Amateur Championship.

He knew that normally he would be able to take a five-iron, even a six-iron, for the distance. But he also knew that to balloon the ball into that wind would be disastrous; that he needed, above all, control. So he took out the four-iron and drilled the ball so low that at first it looked as if he had topped it.

But he had struck it perfectly. It pored its way under the gale, dead straight, pitched 20 feet short of the pin and stopped 12 feet away. It was magnificent: a stroke to make you realise that you

have just seen something that few golfers in the world could achieve, let alone someone aged only 18.

Afterwards Garcia remembered the shot with pleasure. "I really enjoyed that," he said. "I enjoy this type of golf where you have to manufacture shots into the wind. We don't get it in Spain, or in America where I play a lot."

Garcia was round in 72 on that dreadful day, qualifying comfortably for the match-play stages of a championship he needed to win, that being the only way he could get into the Open Championship because he had decided that he would not attempt the Open qualifying rounds.

But winning the Amateur is not easy. You have to meet, and beat, players who really can't play but are having their day of days, as well as players who can play and have to be beaten; and you also have to beat the player who is barely recognisable as yourself on those days when your game goes completely awry.

Garcia knew all that. "To win this you have to be very

lucky," he said. "It is eight rounds and you cannot play all of them well. You have to hope that when you play badly your opponent plays worse."

But what Garcia did not say is that when you are averaging, season-long, 69.33 strokes a round and have a handicap of plus 5.3 you tend to make your own luck. He was a lethal presence and comfortably won the championship, beating the Welshman Craig Williams in the final by 7 & 6.

That got him into the Open, of course, where he put up a performance which in most years would have won him the Silver Medal for the leading amateur. He totalled 282, tying for 28th place, 12 behind Mark O'Meara but also 10 behind Justin Rose. The latter had lost in the first round at Muirfield.

Rose promptly, and prematurely, turned professional. Garcia, whose Amateur win also qualified him for the US Masters at Augusta, continued with the unpaid work experience. In 1999 he played in three Nike Tour events in the United States, opening with

rounds of 66, 67 in Monterrey to lead after 36 holes before finishing 19th. In the Nike Greensboro Open he had rounds of 72, 67, 68 and 68 to place third, a finish that did not particularly impress him.

"It is not normal," he said. "For a young player to be top of the leaderboard in tournaments like this. Not normal, but I am comfortable being there. I play to win. I expect to win. That way you take less shots than if you are just trying to make the cut."

Golf in general does not welcome prodigies. Of the last 35 major championships winners, only two — Tiger Woods in 1997 and Ernie Els in 1994 — have been under 25. But the man the golfing world knows as El Nino, The Kid, will be 19 next Saturday and three months later, after the Masters, he will be a professional.

Two weeks after that, in the Peugeot Spanish Open, he will make his professional debut and whether golf likes it or not he seems certain to be a major force. This year he was 34th in that tournament, but his 11-under-par total was the lowest by an amateur in European Tour history. The professional Garcia will be aiming to improve that finish, by something like 33 places.



Garcia sinks another putt. ANDREW REDINGTON

The weather in Europe